

Sermon: Friday Night
Synod Assembly, Northeastern Minnesota Synod 2019
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John 14:27 “Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid.”

-Jesus

Ephesians 4:1-7 I therefore, the prisoner in the Lord, ***beg you to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called,***² with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love,³ making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.⁴ There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope of your calling,⁵ one Lord, one faith, one baptism,⁶ one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all.⁷ But each of us was given grace according to the measure of Christ’s gift.

Sermon Title: “Lead a Life worthy – of the calling to which you have been called”

I begin by reminding us of a central tenant of Christian Faith and our Lutheran Theology:
God does not **DEMAND** a response of faith

God **CREATES** a response of faith

In other words: God gives, what God desires from us; God provides what is needed for the new life in Christ we are called to. This is called, grace. Understanding this makes all the difference in understanding tonight’s Reading from Ephesians: “Lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called.” “Worthiness” is a gift and a pronouncement on us from God, not something we made up in the basement of our soul, or proved by our perfect Christian performance.

An illustration will help us here. Have you been fortunate enough to have in your life someone who loved you unconditionally and you knew absolutely knew it? Someone who had your back, someone who was for you, not against you? Someone whose own strength and character somehow granted you a sense of worthiness? My mother was that way. She granted, through her unconditional love, her commitment and her maturity a way for me to understand what “worthiness” means both as her son, and for the Christian life. I grew up in South Minneapolis, on 36th Avenue. When I was in Kindergarten, my mother would walk the 4 blocks to Morris Park Elementary School with me, both ways. She held my hand in those first few weeks and was always there when School day was over, there at the front door, where lots of other mothers stood waiting for their kindergarten child. But when I was six, and in first grade all of that changed. Now I was to walk to school without her holding my hand, or even walking with me anymore. I remember being terrified, after all there were big 6th graders out there, and they were scary.

During the summer before first grade, mom prepped me: “Thomas, you’ll be in First grade this fall, you’re a big boy now. You can walk all the way to school and back now by yourself. I’ll be here at home if you need me for anything, but I’m proud of you. And you know God is with you

always Thomas.” I was filled with pride, and thankful for what she said, but also terrified of those big sixth grade boys. As the first day of school approached, I begged her to walk at least that first day with me. She said, “I’ll go out as far as the sidewalk and watch you all the way down 36th avenue, and then when you turn the corner on to 55th street, you can bravely walk on your own. I’ll still be standing there at the sidewalk for awhile, don’t worry. Oddly enough, it was all I needed. I won’t say I never got scared, I did. But mom gave me something that helped me for the rest of my life. She said in effect: “Here’s the world, Thomas. Beautiful and terrible things can happen. Walk right into it with courage.”

What did she give me? What did she create in me, by her own goodness?

1-Assurance: Mom gave me a powerful sign that I was doing the right thing by leaving from that house, that table, and her presence by walking on my own even though it was hard. She was saying, “You’re doing the right thing, I’m proud of you.” **2- Dignity.** I understood I was trusted by mom. Do you remember what that feels like in your life? Someone honors you by granting you space/permission to move into a life of purpose and you become stronger. **3-Strength.** My mother gave me strength through *her* strength. She gave me a grace, a costly grace; the kind mature people who love you deeply give you because they know they are sending you on a journey that will eventually take you away from their close proximity as you are set free into the beautiful and tarnished world.

Ephesians 4 goes on to say, “we must no longer be children, tossed to and fro and blown about by every wind of doctrine.....but speaking the truth in love, we must grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ.” A life worth of what God has called us to is a live of growing up into Christ and his values, and empowered by his grace. “Surely you remember that you were taught in him as truth is in Jesus. You were taught to put away your former way of life.....and be renewed in the Spirit.....and clothe yourselves with the new self, created according to the likeness of God.....So let us speak the truth to our neighbors, for we are members of one another.”

So the first thing we need to remember about “lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called” is that it is in God’s divine love that you are already counted as “worthy.” God calls you worthy –so you are. In Christ, God has done what my mother did on a smaller scale, but on an infinitely grander scale: namely, God gifted us with *costly grace*, a grace that cost Jesus his very life for our sake. Don’t wait to join the calling you have already been called into until: 1) you have a Spiritual director. Don’t get me wrong, these folks are amazing – and there are a number sitting out here among us. God has empowered you through your baptisms and through the means of grace for you to lead the Christ life. You and I would do well along the journey to enlist the help of these faithful Spiritual Directors, just don’t put your call on hold. 2) Don’t wait for that perfect moment like when the kids are grown, when you move to that dream location, when you get on church Council, or when you’ve taken several courses through our Synod’s Lay Leader network. And don’t wait till something bad happens in your life, and then “bargain” with God. You don’t need to bargain, you are held close in God’s unconditional love.

Our Ephesians text invites us to lead this Christ life with these attributes: 1) Humility. Remember Jesus said “you did not chose me, I chose you.” 2) Patience. Jesus’ parables are filled with seeds that grow slowly, yeast that permeates dough slowly etc.... 3) Love. “Bear one another in love.” Love in the New Testament is not sentimental mush or contrived feelings for another person, just concrete love that seeks the other’s welfare. 3) “Make every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit, in the bond of peace.” This requires maturity, growing up. kids take their marbles and go home when they don’t get their way. Adults work things out in mature ways, which is of course, harder work to do. But remember, we are to “grow up into Christ, who is the head of the church.”

Humility, patience, love, peace; these are not the values of our mainstream culture. In fact we hear the very opposite ad nauseum. I’m convinced that if our culture had a “catechism” one of the key doctrines of its “faith” would be “Lead a life worthy of being applauded for your wealth, power and status over others.” Just a quick glance tells it all:

- Shootings this week in Chaba Synagogue in California, and at the University of North Carolina
- Easter Day violent attacks on Christian congregations in Sri Lanka, weeks ago
- The Tree of Life Synagogue shootings in Pittsburg six months ago
- Arson one month ago at three Historic Black churches in Louisiana
- Muslims; both adults and children killed in our country and in New Zealand
- Evil and reprehensive words and behavior form politicians, presidents, comedians
- Fearful migrant families, running from death dealers, children torn apart from their families by our own officials at our border while seeking asylum

The world needs you. It needs your calling in Christ to be seen and felt. There are plenty of places to lead a life worthy of our calling Christ. It may seem hard but remember: God does not demand a response of faith; God creates a response of faith! You can start with yourself; forgive yourself as God has, then forgive your co-worker, that parent, neighbor, or your children. Forgive your fellow church members. Begin the practice of encouraging your congregational leaders, as Christ encouraged the leaders he chose. Encourage your congregation to finish that intentional mission plan, and complete it before 2020 for the sake of ministry in your community and world. (Remember your Bishop’s challenge?) Use today’s text as your guide: “With all humility, patience, bearing with one another in love and in the bond of peace.”

Jesus is calling you to stand up to evil, live into God’s dream as shown in Scripture and in Jesus’ life which is that loving and bold distributive justice he practiced rather than the violent retributive justice born of power/privilege so prevalent in our world. Get to know your neighbors, just as Jesus got to know his neighbors, all of them, including our Native American neighbors as our Together Here Team is leading us into. There are five Reservations in our Synod alone. Join a learning session with our Synod’s team. Jesus is calling you to responsible stewardship of the earth just as our Synod’s Eco-Faith Team has been faithfully reminding us and challenging us to participate in, and in our Peace not Walls Team with regard to peace in the Holy Land.

Chapter 4 of your congregation's Constitution says of the purpose of the church, of your calling: **"Serve in response to God's love to meet human needs; caring for the sick and the aged, advocating dignity and justice for all people, working for peace and reconciliation among the nations and standing with the poor and powerless and committing itself to their needs"**

Does that scare you? Remember: **God does not demand a response of faith, God creates a response of faith.**

To grow up in Christ means we don't remain children anymore. And Jesus is granting you courage: "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled. And do not let them be afraid." My mother's sentiments to me in first grade, times a billion!

I read this from a Spiritual Director online recently: "Christ is risen, not as a broken victim. Not as an angry avenger; But in a third way: With dignity, compassion and love." Let us live a life worthy of our calling. Let us walk in Jesus' third way, with dignity for all, compassion for all and love for all. Yesterday is gone, tomorrow has not yet come, lead a life worthy of your calling, today. Amen.