

Vocation, the Word, and Baptism
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Deac. Mary J Moerbe

Caveats: I know how to write a sentence, but I wrote this as a presentation and therefore used some otherwise incorrect practices for my own sake. That will be true for all six papers. Also, I recognize that there are rules about when to say *sex* rather than *gender*. I may not be consistent, however I hope I am sufficiently clear nonetheless.

Session One

Vocation is a term with various connotations. Interestingly, one can consider it a rare type of word called a contronym: a word which means one thing and also its opposite. What does vocation mean in secular parlance? Often either a blue-collar job, as defined by vo-tech schools, or an esteemed profession, such as a doctor, which one has pursued in part through unique passion. Either it is technical or passionate, low class or high, “standard” or in some way above par.

This wide spectrum helps to explain how vocation has become a) so confusing, and b) so tied to passion. Another way people understand vocation as a term is a passion for a particular subset of either population or field, such as a “vocation with children” or a “vocation in music.”

Now, raise your hand if you’ve read a Christian (but not Lutheran) book on vocation. Raise your hand if you’ve read a Lutheran book on vocation. Were the assumptions the same? No! Even within Christianity, the term can be used in widely different ways.

This paper focuses on a Lutheran approach to vocation, and Luther famously worked with it as a Scriptural teaching and seated it firmly upon God’s Word.

CENTRALITY OF THE WORD

Voco is Latin for “I call.” Who calls? The Lord calls. How? By His Word.

In the beginning was the *Word* and it won’t surprise any of us to hear that the Word is also in the middle and the end. The Word is central to Vocation to such an extent that there is no vocation apart from God’s Word.

Let’s be clear. We can have desires and tendencies. We can have thoughtful reasons to pursue specific paths. There can also be a lot of confidence behind intuition. Let’s call those *pulls, considerations, and influences*, but *vocation* is about the Lord, His Word, and its applications for us and our neighbors. Vocation is about the Lord calling us through His Word.

We have six sessions together so we get to be thorough. Can God work through thoughts, feelings, and tendencies? Sure. Can God work through whatever skills and talents God has given you? Sure. What about passions that are in line with Scripture? Sure! But to paraphrase from the Catechism, as we talk about God’s will on earth and our daily bread, “We pray in [those] petitions that God would lead us to know it, and to receive our daily bread with thanksgiving.”

We *know* vocations because they are revealed explicitly in God’s Word. We may *choose* because of influences, but we *know* from the Word. God’s Word—and God’s work and presence—are central.

When God speaks, He and His Word are present. Vocation is about God speaking *to you* through His Word. He calls *you* . . . to what? All sorts of things! To actions & offices, to attitudes of thanksgiving and to refuge in the mercy of God.

Our God, as you are well aware, loves to work through His Word. He speaks: we listen and respond. He sends us out and we go in the Spirit. At the same, He doesn't let a few words slip and then usher us out His door. God is with His Word, even as His Word works in us in our day to day lives.

On one hand, vocation has to do with earthly stuff, as we will see. On the other, it is God's bidding and God working His will throughout the world.

Any questions so far?

THREE ESTATES

To organize our thoughts a little, who'd like to share Luther's three estates or realms? (Church, State, Family) In each paradigm, there are structures, authorities, and responsibilities.

The Latinized Greek terms are *politia*, *oikonomia*, and *ecclesia*. Number one: *Politia*. In this case, state does not mean a big central government. Many of our notions and understandings of government are recent historical innovations. This estate is *not* peculiarly about a king or any form of government. The phrase refers to means civil administrations. "City stuff." You can see that both *politics* and *police* come from this term. It's law, order, and contracts. It's business and society at large.

Number two: *Oikonomia*. *Oikonomia* is where we get the term economy. This is a big concept, but let's begin by saying this is not a business or political term. *Oikia* is Greek for house. Admittedly, this is taking the etymology pretty far back, but it is helpful to approach it in this way. *Oikonomia* is a *household* term. Economy centered on family and their goods. Like daily bread, *Oikonomia* is a big, broad term, including family, servants, budgeting, working, etc. Products? Yes. Money? Sure. The term comes to be associated with management, planning, and the systems we use within our living. Even education can be seen here, as education trains up children and servants to mature individually and to grow in ones abilities to discern and contribute.

Remember, the home was the center of where one worked, whom one worked for, and why one worked in the first place: to produce daily bread for the household. For thousands of years! One *made a living*, which was lived and primarily spent *at home*.

So let me state very clearly that Luther did include jobs in his understanding of family. Partly it is because servants could live and serve with the same family for generations. That is, employees could pretty effectively become family. They were part of the household. Also, a man earning a living did so, again, for those he lived with *at home*.

Yes, employers and employees now can have contracts. Contracts would fall under the realm of the state. Do you see? These estates are not exclusive—in fact we all live in all of them—but their purposes are different.

Johann Gerhard, the 17th century Lutheran, put it well when he labeled family the Nurturing Estate.¹ Family is where we may work together, but it's for the sake of the family and the family's needs. Chores?

¹ *Scholia Pietas*, vol. 1 (Repristination Press, 2006) 261, 269.

Unpaid! Not because work doesn't deserve payment, but because family is the kind of relationship where things are done *without being based on merit, work, money or anything else like that*.

One does not earn a place in family. And our position is not dependent upon works. Or social advancements. Or fair shares!

So, 1) Law & Order, 2) one's living & home life, and 3). Who can tell me what *ecclesia* means? *Ecclesia*: the gathered, yes, but also the *called*! In our case, those called, gathered, enlightened and united into the very Bride of Christ by God's gift!

1) Law & Order, 2) one's living & home life, and 3) the assembly of believers and the Body of Christ called by the Word. Now, does that Word of God pertain only within the assembly? No. God's Word calls, gathers, enlightens, and equips within the church, but it also affects every area of our life. It affects family, friendships, neighbors, workers, etc.

Believers are the called. Now, does God send His Word out, calling publicly, inviting everyone? Yes. And it is along those lines that believers have vocations—God calls. The called respond. Unbelievers refuse to take heed.

Both groups may do very similar things. Yet one lives by the Word while another does not. In vocational terms, we can see this through Luther's use of both office (or a position) and a personal vocation. Believers and unbelievers may be in the same office within creation, such as father or mother, yet *vocation* is specifically God's Word applied to that role and arena of life.

Let's list family offices: husband, wife, mother, father, son, daughter, cousins, in-laws, grandparents, aunts and uncles, etc.

These are all filled by believers *and* unbelievers. God works through both as His Word works His will in creation. Believers, however, at least in part, embody God's Words and instructions as they go about their lives.

VOCATION OF NEIGHBORS

From the beginning, God created Adam and Eve. He instituted marriage and family, and from the genealogies it is clear that all people are related. Literally. Figuratively. In all ways related. In Adam, all fell. In Jesus, all have hope.

Still, over the first several thousands of years family drifted apart. It still does. Although humanity constitutes a sprawling family, we rarely encounter that as a societal foundation. Instead, one recognizes neighbors. *Near* ones.

In our case, Jesus has not only brought us near to Himself—for forever and ever—but He also gathers His people near to one another. Sometimes for a long time, sometimes shorter. But all those 150 references to neighbors in Scripture? Call to mind the vocation of neighbor.

You can fit the vocation of neighbor into all three estates. You can also try to consider it as its own, narrower topic. There is not to my knowledge a definitive outline of how Lutherans must speak about these things (ie., either the vocation of neighbor or one's familial relationship throughout every generation and location), but here is something helpful. Go to the Small Catechism. Table of Duties. There are vocations of clergy and hearer, governors and subjects, husbands, wives, parents, children, workers, employers. Even young people! Widows.

These are all vocations. God calls us *to hear* and to act in certain ways with certain people. At the bottom of the Table of Duties is a category “For All in Common” or “To Everyone.” It reads:

The commandments ... are summed up in this one rule: “Love your neighbor as yourself.” Rom. 13:9

I urge ... that requests, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for everyone. 1 Tim. 2:1

That is your duty to your neighbors. All of them. This is a starting point of applying God’s Word our lives in every relationship, no matter how familiar or foreign folks may be.

Some vocations line up neatly so that you can, in a way, parse them out. Let’s use neighbor as an opening example:

Vocation of Neighbor

Neighbor to Serve: Neighbor

Unique role: Utterly unconditional. May or may not be a temporary involvement. May or may not be complete strangers.

Duties: Love. Pray. Give thanks for them!

Perks: Society. Society only exists when neighbors agree to coexist in close proximity.

Temptations: Coveting

Crosses: Giving without guarantee of repayment

Status: Equals

One could dive into this more deeply. How is one *humane* to neighbors, as our relationship is largely based around our shared humanity? How is one *neighborly* and what does that look like in various situations?

One can also consider historical and cultural elements:

- A recent emphasis on friendship over family
- A recent emphasis on age-groups
- The existence of like-minded enclaves
- Racism
- Power structures, whether they involve government, employment, various other establishments (including networks)
- Generational effects, etc.

These all pertain to relationships between neighbors, for good or for ill.

However, as Christians, one needn’t answer all questions. Rather, one is called to love and serve one’s neighbor, whomever that neighbor may be, as opportunities allow. These opportunities include all sorts of exchanges that God allows such as dialogue and conversation and helping with physical, mental, and spiritual needs.

Those in the church, by the Ten Commandments, are instructed to honor God and Creation and to rely upon His Word. We are to honor our parents, parenthood, and other authorities and neither hurt nor harm, but help and befriend our neighbor in his body. Those in the church are commanded to honor marriage and love and honor each other, to help our neighbor to improve and protect his possessions and income, and to defend him, speak well of him, and explain everything in the kindest way. Certainly this includes

helping and being of service to him in keeping both our neighbor's inheritance and house and also his wife, workers, etc.

In other words, encourage folks to stay and do their duties, and give them support so they can do so, even as we stay and do our duties, because of the command and promises our Lord has granted.

In Very Practical Terms

When one has an opportunity to get to know someone, in practical terms, it does not help to appear shocked. Some people want to shock, but shock is not a relational element. So try not to be shocked. By anything.

Further, one must avoid all dehumanizing. Even if the neighbor dehumanizes him or herself. Perhaps especially in that case. Our Lord and Savior brought humanity into the Godhead in His Incarnation. He would not have us belittle it, even as others may be prone to do so.

Relationships can take time to develop. As a neighborly relationship grows, more focused help can be offered. It is worth noting that the vocation of neighbor does not come with a timetable other than injunctions toward mercy rather than neglect.

Cultural elements can be at play; however, God's Word is straightforward. The checklists are purposefully broad: Love your neighbors *as yourself*, pray for them, help them, feed the hungry, etc. Right?

Although we might prefer checklists with "next actionable steps," people rarely fit into those kinds of categories. Instead, one is supposed to wonder. God works wonderful deeds and God has made man into a wondrous creature. So wonder a little. :)

TAILORED SERVICE

But! We do *not* always feed the hungry! I repeat, we do not actually always feed the hungry! If you see a baby at a church potluck—maybe I'm going out on an edge here—don't give an infant cake without permission from a parent!

Generally, yes, feed the hungry, but we are not to take God's commands and use them as an excuse to do what we want. God commands us to help one another, especially regarding *needs*. So sometimes our actions need to be filtered through our vocations. *Parents* feed children. It has been given to *parents* to make decisions for the child, even over matters like cake. What if that little neighborhood child has allergies? *Needs* can have less common considerations, depending on the neighbor.

Vocation involves *tailored service*. The better you know your neighbor, the better you can help. Although this won't really affect your donations overseas that go toward food, schools, and orphanages, it *is* a major factor in *marriages, parenting, congregations, schools, etc.*

You get to act more like a big brother or sister to that baby at the potluck than a parent. Effectively, some tailoring is reserved for other vocations. Parents parent. Neighbors can help, but not by bypassing parental efforts toward proper nutrition. Right?

Likewise, specific neighbors and tailored service means no two marriages will be exactly alike. No two friendships are exactly alike. Even infants in arms are *not necessarily alike!* God's Word doesn't change,

but service to neighbor includes assessing that particular neighbor, as well as those in authority over the neighbor.

Situational ethics sounds as though it has a neighbor-centered approach. Proponents may insist things like, “That’s what they would have wanted!” or “They shouldn’t have to suffer.” “They don’t want to be a burden!” “It’s different for her!” But God’s Word still applies. Don’t kill people. Don’t presume people know what is best for themselves.

The infant may well reach for your slice of cake. Or a sharp knife. Or the pills next to your coffee cup. Reaching does not necessarily authorize reception!

Vocation is not about giving people what they want or what they would have chosen. Vocation has to do with God’s Word and, usually, *needs* related to body, soul, and mind. It also acts as a safeguard. Parents can protect their children from well-meaning attention, even as parents try to protect children from themselves.

Christian ethics is a field that can help people try to do what is best in murky situations. Christian ethics supplements Christian vocation. More specifically, it helps us to recognize Godly boundaries and vocational distinctions. For example, doctors do not exist to kill people, but to help them. At the same time, sometimes doctors have to let people know that a loved one is in dying. There are important distinctions between killing someone and letting him die.

I am not an expert in ethics, but boundaries and discernment are very much a part of all of our vocations. And, before you can discern, you need to listen. Vocation begins, ends, and is centered on God’s Word. We listen and respond. In our vocations, we also listen and respond to our neighbors, though neighbors we can also observe in other ways.

Tailored service—that is, service to a particular, specific individual rather than a thoughtless response to a stereotype or general to do list—is implied throughout Scripture. Tailored service is a primary reason why the Christian life can never be reduced to lists or goals. That in itself would dehumanize and gloss over things for which we can give thanks!

(You can think of it like this. You take care of *your* dog, not a general dog. Likewise, you are called to serve actual individuals with proper names rather than vague, faceless stereotypes.)

Within the office of neighbor, all people can, and should, be *humane* and *neighborly*. All people can love in specifics as well as generalities. As Christians, we should be humane, neighborly, and *Christian*. As we can put effort into service toward actual people, we are blessed to trust the living God to be active, too. We can give thanks for our neighbors, pray for them, and remember that they, too, are creations of God bought by the blood of Christ.

WHY SHOULD PARISHIONERS CARE

We are all called by God. He speaks. We respond. He reveals our neighbors to us! And He so kindly uses *words* so that we can comprehend and consider. Still, not everyone thinks along the lines we are considering this mornings so let’s try to look at this from another angle: Why should our parishioners, students, etc., bother to learn or care about vocation?

- Vocation lays down a groundwork for understanding Christian life, both in our relationships toward one another and our relationship toward God.

- Vocation demonstrates God’s Word in our lives *right now*, in word and deed, rest and action.
- Vocation offers a starting point for considering all sorts of practical questions, including:
 - How do I know that I’m doing the right thing?
 - How do I know this is the place for me?
 - What’s my connection to the church? To the world? To the people around me?
 - Why am I supposed to love those who reject me? Why pray for my enemies?
 - How can a pastor forgive my sins?
 - What do you mean, God is my Father? What do you mean, Bride of Christ, etc.

Vocation touches on areas and topics including:

- Application of God’s Word
- Scriptural language
- Christian perspective
- Law & Gospel
- Christian Freedom
- Marriage, Family, raising children in the faith
- Education
- Morality, ethics, decision-making, etc.

In other words, vocation is an entry way to discussing all sorts of things. It is also a perspective, when handled properly, maintains both the Word of God and application to one’s life.

It has been said that vocation is a Lutheran explanation of Christian life. It is a perspective that helps us to understand, not only ourselves and who we are, but how we are connected to those whom God has given us. Vocation grounds us in 1) God’s Word and 2) baptism, and it treats us, in body and soul, individually, collectively, and in specific relationships, while guiding our hearts, minds, and strengths in trust toward God.

Vocation lets us literally ask, “Where do we turn?” Where do we turn for love? Bars? Or families and church? Where do we turn for forgiveness? The church and whomever we wronged. Where do we turn for money? A job! Where do we turn for justice? God-willing, we turn to honest policemen, lawyers, judges, etc. We work toward good laws and checks and balances against corruption.

Often we do these things instinctively or because we were brought up to. Yet God’s Word also speaks directly on some of these matters.

Vocations are also typically the locations of our crosses, our sacrifices. In Luke 9:23, Jesus says, “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me.” Daily. Because our crosses *are daily and situated in our daily lives*.

Thank you, Jesus, for defining Your own terms. Deny yourself and follow Christ and His Word. As a spouse, that may look different than at work! We deny ourselves differently toward our parents than toward our children. Location, or realm, matters.

Vocation has to do with both body and soul, and it is precisely where Law & Gospel meet Christian freedom. All three apply! (That can get complicated!)

Some vocations seem to come with their own particular temptations, but, brothers and sisters in Christ, we are called in baptism to deny ourselves and follow Jesus. We are called to daily drowning and

repentance. No one can do it for us. And we can only do it by the power and working of the Holy Spirit through His Word. Thanks be to God!

And that makes a difference in the rest of our lives, too. Even without us being showy or obnoxious in the least!

BAPTISM

Where does Christian life begin? (Baptism) Where does vocation begin? (Baptism!)

God calls us to baptism. This is a primary, foundational reality to every aspect of our Christian life. On this earth and the one to come! Strictly speaking, only the baptized have vocations. As Paul says in 1 Corinthians 7:17, “Only let each person lead the life that the Lord has assigned to him, and to which God has called him. This is my rule in all the churches.”

You may have been born into, for example, the office of child. In your baptism, you were assigned and affirmed as a called child!

Sometimes I think that vocation is as much a matter of Scriptural interconnects as anything else. The Lord who knit you in your mother’s womb, also knows our days and our hours. The hairs on our head! And it is the Lord who orders our days (Psalm 90)! The Lord who has written, every one of them, the days that were *formed for us*, when as yet there was none of them (Ps. 139:16).

Christians are called *to* baptism and called *in* baptism. By God’s work. To new life. That happens to look a lot like it did before. Not that we are unchanged, but baptism doesn’t replace human life; it restores it.

Life and death, seasons and harvests, good times and bad, all are in the hands of our Lord. And, as my husband says, that is a good place to be.

BAPTISM AND CREATION

Note well that baptism doesn’t fundamentally change creation. It is a restoration and renewal. A regeneration.

The Baptismal Word does not negate or conflict with the Word of Creation. God does not speak against Himself. However, some people really do argue that baptism undoes creation. That in baptism, the human body no longer has genetic or other physical differences. That baptism wipes away that God speaks, at times, with distinctions between men and women, clergy and laity, those with authority and those under authority.

One of the many problems with heresies is that they don’t stay inside a brain or spirit. They seep out into conversations, arguments, and practices. When one considers baptism a break from the physical, there are implications. Not least of which is how one listens to God’s Word, responds to creation, and teaches the resurrection.

There are other temptations, too, which would distract us from God’s mercies and gifts. Luther says in the Large Catechism:

It is of the greatest importance that we esteem Baptism excellent, glorious, and exalted, for which we contend and fight chiefly, because the world is now so full of sects clamoring that Baptism is an external thing, and that external things are of no benefit. But let it be ever so much an external

thing, here stand God's Word and command which institute, establish, and confirm Baptism. But what God institutes and commands cannot be a vain, but must be a most precious thing, though in appearance it were of less value than a straw.

“An external thing.” Think about that phrase. Some of us can fall into belittling external things. But thanks be to God that He Himself comes to us from *outside* our fallen hearts, our dimmed eyes, and our faltering understanding.

He is the reality. *He* recognizes attachments and detachments.

Rather than the judge over external things, we are the fallen branch. *We* are the pitiable external. Disconnected. Disjointed. All out of sorts. While He is the one who grafts, mends, molds, and rejoins us to the Living Vine.

We are His broken creation. We are external, though God repeatedly draws us near, offering attachment after attachment. Though we fail to recognize it so often.

THE FIRST VOCATION

To be perfectly clear, the first vocation is baptism and the call to faith. Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one. Hear and be baptized. Enter His glorious kingdom for ever and ever.

Note that even the call to faith, the call to *listen to God*, is explicitly tied to creation. To the human mouth and hear. To water. And the human hands through which God baptizes a child.

This is not because these things—language or baptism—belong to man—they don't. Instead, God explicitly works through creation, mediates His gifts, and shares His dominion over creation with us, His human creatures. *God* baptizes, yet God has chosen to act in this way: through fallen human beings.

Here's a longer quote from the good Doctor Luther:

[W]e always teach that the Sacraments and all external things which God ordains and institutes should not be regarded according to the coarse, external mask, as we regard the shell of a nut, but as the Word of God is included therein. 20] For thus we also speak of the parental estate and of civil government. If we propose to regard them in as far as they have noses, eyes, skin, and hair, flesh and bones, they look like Turks and heathen, and some one might start up and say: Why should I esteem them more than others? But because the commandment is added: Honor thy father and thy mother, I behold a different man, adorned and clothed with the majesty and glory of God. The commandment (I say) is the chain of gold about his neck, yea, the crown upon his head, which shows to me how and why one must honor this flesh and blood.

21] Thus, and much more even, you must honor Baptism and esteem it glorious on account of the Word, since He Himself has honored it both by words and deeds; moreover, confirmed it with miracles from heaven. For do you think it was a jest that, when Christ was baptized, the heavens were opened and the Holy Ghost descended visibly, and everything was divine glory and majesty?

Baptism is a vocation. In a sense, *the* vocation. We hear God's Word; we become His.

It is an *eternal* vocation. Passive in its reception of faith. *Familial* in its impact.

Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ says, “Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me, and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me” (Matthew 10:37), yet what does He do? “Truly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or wife or brothers[a] or parents or children, for the sake of the kingdom of God, 30 who will not receive many times more in this time, and in the age to come eternal life” (Luke 18:29-30).

Baptism is a rebirth. That’s a family word. Baptism makes you an inheritor. Family word. You have been adopted by the Father, by whom all fatherhood is known! (Eph 3:15)

Yes, baptism belongs in the church. In *ecclesia*. Among the faithful. Witness the action of God! Still those faithful are also brothers and sisters. *By blood*. United, very seriously, by a single Father, who brings us to His home to talk to us and share His Supper.

The church, the called and gathered beloved of God, exists for the forgiveness of sins & proclamation of God’s Word. But thanks be to God it, too, is also family.

BAPTISM AS PERFECT IMAGE OF VOCATION

Baptism is the perfect image and example of vocation. In Baptism, God draws us near by the call of His Word. He makes us *His* neighbor, *His* near-one. He offers us His own Divine Service. He gives us new life. Cancels the debt of sin. Washes, renews, and clothes us. He makes us His own, joining us to the death and resurrection of Christ, as said so well in Romans 6:3. Grants permanent citizenship in His Kingdom!

And us? In baptism, we receive God’s gifts. Enter the Kingdom. Experience freedom for the first time! We are equipped by God’s Word and we are *honored* to be in His presence and to share His many, many gifts.² Life begins as a child of God.

Let’s take a second to parse out baptism as a vocation.

God’s Service toward Us in Baptism

Neighbor Served: The baptized

Unique role: Granting new birth, citizenship, clothing in Christ, unity with Christ in His death and resurrection, all things we cannot do for ourselves!

Duty? It’s all free gift!

Proper Work: Speak & Sustain

Perks: A filled hall celebrating His Son!

Status: Gift-Giver; Father; Brother

Our Vocation in Baptism

Neighbor Served: We passively receive

Unique role: Rebirth, faith & forgiveness

Duties: Live life by God’s Word

² The Large Catechism is really great. It answers what baptism profits, gives, works, and signifies. It reads, “State it most simply thus, that the power, work, profit, fruit, and end of Baptism is this, namely, to save. . . . but to be saved, we know, is nothing else than to be delivered from sin, death, and the devil, and to enter into the Kingdom of Christ, and to live with Him forever” (LC 6:24-26). It *signifies* a very real putting to death the Old Adam and the resurrection of the new man . . . “so that a truly Christian life is nothing else than a daily baptism, once begun and ever to be continued (65).

Proper Work: *Listen. Receive. Trust.*

Perks: Inheritance, ransom, the Father's ear, the Son's assistance, the Lord's Supper once we've grown into it, etc.

Temptations: Idolatry

Cross: Lingered Old Adam & theological discernment as you lean not on human understanding

Status: Membership in the Church/ Joined to Christ

Your status as a baptized believer is that you get to stand as a Child of God & Member of the church, which is the very Bride of Christ. This status—this standing, footing, perhaps office—does not rely on momentary fluctuations. It's a significant, ongoing change that affects us and our interactions with others. This is the office of all offices!

Our baptism does not rely on our ability to follow Jesus every moment. We are not condemned as we lay asleep. We are baptized children of God! It's brought us into a state of grace.

The *status* denotes some perks. We, *we*, lowly folks are allowed into the holy presence of God. We cry out to Him, "Abba, father!" approaching Him with confident prayer! Day or night, 24/7 access! We eat at His table. Hear His speak. And we are joined into the very Bride of Christ!

Notice the physical elements. God gathers people *actually together*. In their bodies! Right? As we cry out with our voices and not only our thoughts, we are using our bodies in service to our vocation. We take the Body and Blood for the forgiveness of sins *with our mouths*. The institution and power remain in the Word, yet both our body & soul is affected and activated.

Baptism is a joining of God's Word and creation. It is new life for us! A life dependent on God & His Word! At the same time, it is also a blessed gift to others. So, while baptism is a call that saves us, baptism is also what remakes us into an embodiment of God's love, answering His calls to love and serve our neighbors.

We receive and are thereby equipped to share. Though we are not all called to be mediators, I think it is fair to say that the baptized are media (mediums) that God uses in many and various ways.

DISTINCTIONS BETWEEN BAPTISM & VOCATION

There are definite distinctions between baptism and vocation, as we commonly speak of it. Baptism saves. It is a means of grace and a sacrament. Vocations are not necessarily a means of grace—although thank you, pastors, each and every one of you, for forgiving sins and feeding the faithful the Body and Blood of Christ! We are thankful for you and for your office! <Applause>

Vocation is also an example of God's Word coming and working its will on creation. In Lutheran terminology we can classify it in the broader category of daily bread. Vocation includes the Office of the Holy Ministry, but it also extends throughout creation, dependent upon God's creative word (for example, procreation and therefore parenthood depends on God's Word, "Be fruitful and multiply").

Both baptism and vocations in general are gifts and acts of God. God gives baptism. God gives vocations. Both by His Word. Joined to physical means. In love and undeserved mercy toward creation.

However, baptism is a direct gift from God, while other vocations can be more about sharing God's gifts. The churchly gifts are *direct* and revealed. Other services, at times, may be broader and include *indirect* or even unknown services.

Baptism is the blessed Trinity acting upon us. Vocation lets us help one another. Even as God and His Word accompanies, empowers, etc.

To be perfectly clear, vocation is a means, not only for us to help our neighbor, but also for how God typically works to help our neighbor. Vocation is at once our work and God's work. Yet not necessarily saving work.

We could speak about vocation as a means of love, or means of service, as it is distinct from the means of Grace/ means of faith.

VOCATION, CREATION & THE SEXES

As we begin to consider family vocations, we need to consider male and female. Vocation and creation go together. God works through His Word, as recorded in Scripture, and as it echoes throughout creation. God spoke and through the ages things have come to be such that you were born the sex you are.

Is sex a vocation? I've heard Calvinist circles articulate it in that way, but it strikes me as dangerous territory. What is the Office of Man? Woman? What is the institution? What are God's words precisely on that matter?

When we depart from God's Words in Scripture, we depart from what we *know*. And it opens the doors to all sorts of misinterpretations.

Ladies and gentlemen, are all women to submit arbitrarily to all men? No! There are unkind but very descriptive words for such scenarios.

Does the Order of Creation undo the institution of marriage? No! The two should not be pitted against each other.

If anyone wants to approach you and twist vocation in order to excuse same-sex attraction, gender dysphoria, ordination of women, etc., here's the distinction. Vocation relies on creation. It is established and bound by God's Word, but it is also dependent upon creation.

Again, God does not speak against Himself. Scripture may be against sin and every evil, but it is *not* against God's creative word and will.

Male and female are honorable gifts within creation. Gifts embedded within us. Attributes given to us. But as far as I am aware, there is no office of woman, although there are offices exclusively for women and vice versa.

To imagine male or female as an external is to fail to see how pervasive it is in humanity. Does that mean everything boils down to one's sexual organs? No. And you'll see that in a Lutheran perspective on vocation. But considering sex as an idea, goal, or orientation is an explicit abstraction and disembodied understanding.

Considering something theoretically or separately from everything else *also excludes the revelation of Scripture*. God's Word certainly implies ideas and ideals; however, suggesting that something exists in thought or as an idea with neither a physical existence nor Scriptural reference implies an innovation, likely of cultural representation, rather than an established fact or understanding.

To go against creation is to go against God's Word which created that creation. That's the thing. If God created things and walk away, maybe we could play around and change things up. But a Lutheran understanding of creation includes how God continues to sustain and preserve it.

EMBODIED SOULS

There are implications to Scripture's teaching that we are embodied souls. Embodied souls, male or female. You do not *have* a gender. You *are* your gender. Although I'll admit I hesitate over that last sentence a little.

I'm going to add some nuance and you can tell me what you think of my logic:

I am not representative of all women. I am not called to be. I have found zero calls to womanhood in the Holy Bible. Rather I *share* a gender with other women. It is a pervasive part of me and there are earthly vocations open to me because of it. These earthly vocations, like wife and mother, *will not last* into eternity, even though I, as a girl, will.

Sex or gender topics are not easily spoken about these days. And that's true for almost anyone on any side of any topic. The entire spectrum can be dangerous. But I hope to help you talk about these things.

I apologize if I'm offensive or choose less than ideal words sometimes. But here's the deal:

Ladies & gentlemen. I am your sister in Christ. I have no authority over you. But I am honored to be with you. And to assure you of God's hand in the physical, mental, emotional, engendered life He has given us. We will look at all sorts of things that can make folks uncomfortable: power, authority, obedience and submission. Gender roles. Stereotype. Abuse.

I will try not to be obnoxious. Pestering. Inappropriate. Or embarrassing!

But what will make these presentations en-couraging rather than dis-couraging won't be me. It is the Lord, who created and sustains this world. The same Lord who gives us His Word. Both incarnate in His Son and spoken, recorded, extant, preached, and fulfilled. We have the promises of a gracious, far seeing, merciful God and we have both large pictures and minute instruction from the revelation He gives us.

He is the one who makes us male and female. He is the one who sets the solitary into a home—including His own eternal home! He is the one who, in seeing that it was not good for Adam to be alone, instituted not only marriage, but an ever-expanding network of neighbors. With brothers and sisters from random places like Oklahoma, uniting with you through Christ and the Spirit.

INCARNATION & GENDER

Our Lord and Savior came down to earth. He took into Himself human flesh. So that *Jesus*. Is not just a human. But a *man*.

Our God, who created male and female, *knows what He did there*. That He calls Himself male terms regarding Father, Son, and Holy Spirit is significant. The Lord, who created words, and language, and communication, knows how to use these things *really well*. Way better than liberal theologians give Him credit for!

And, frankly? His Bride the Church is female to His male. To belittle the female is to belittle the Bride of Christ: His culminating masterpiece. It is to belittle God's creation and a big ol' portion of those we are called to love and serve!

Our Master is still Incarnate. Still male. And He commands us, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets" (Matthew 22:36-40).

BODILY SERVICE

God explicitly calls you to love your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind! Mark adds, "With all your strength" (Mark 12:30). This includes bodily service. This isn't an excuse to turn inward, away from God's handiwork surrounding you and your life. This isn't suggesting we close our eyes and close our ears.

Do we all know that both reading and prayer were entirely *out loud* during the Old and New Testaments periods? Well into the Roman Empire? Not silent and internal. Spoken & shared! *Oral* comes from the Latin, *ora*, which means to pray.

As Christians in the church militant—that is, not yet triumphant—we use our bodily senses to taste and see that the Lord is good (Ps 34:8). We lift up our voices. We pray that even as we receive our daily bread—whether it's coffee and a skipped breakfast or something heartier—that we see that it really and truly does come from our heavenly Father! That *this life* is part of our life in Christ.

The second commandment is like the first. Your neighbor was also crafted by God. And he—or she—has been given a position of honor within creation, a position of both dominion and service.

Vocation is not disembodied. It's almost the reverse. It's often *bodiness* serving *another* as God lets us further share His gifts.

Some may get squirmy about the *creatureliness* of gender. Yet God's call and command does not contradict His previous Word and work in creation. Vocation belongs in creation.

As we serve our neighbors, we will use our bodies to do so and they will receive our help and assistance through their bodies. Bodies themselves, at times, will guide and affect the reception of our help.

Physical needs are a great place to start if you want to help someone. Sometimes cultural elements will help us as we try to improve our relationships with others. Most importantly, as Christians we must remember that some needs are less visible or less recognized than others, including the most important need for Jesus Christ, our Lord, for both body and soul.

Appendix:

In Vocation

There is God's word and/or an institution, which sets each vocation apart.

There is a particular neighbor to serve.

There is an established role to fill.

There are duties.

There may even be proper works that would be improper in other vocations.

There are perks.

There are temptations.

There are crosses by which we should deny ourselves to follow Jesus.

There is an existence within a hierarchy of authority as determined by God.