

This morning we are continuing our sermon series on FEARLESS LIVING, with our focus on FEARLESS LIVING AT WORK.

In Lutheran theology, work is understood as vocation . . . from the Latin word “*vocatio*” - “*calling*.” Martin Luther’s understanding of vocation was one of the most revolutionary concepts of his day. Luther was a strong advocate for Christians to understand and to live out their baptismal covenant as our “vocation” . . . our whole life is literally our Christian vocation. Luther summarized by saying that our life’s purpose is being a “*little Christ to our neighbor*.” **TO BE CHRIST TO OTHERS IN OUR DAILY ENCOUNTERS!**

Luther’s understanding of vocation not only had to do with a person’s occupation or job or even career, although that was certainly part of it. Luther believed that each baptized Christian was called to service, through a particular “station” or “office” or “duty.” But this is only a partial understanding of Luther. In Luther’s day, Christian vocation was understood to refer explicitly to church-related occupations, as understood by the Catholic Church of that time

But Luther claimed that vocation should be understood primarily in relation to the larger understandings of God’s creative work and God’s law, which permeates all of creation, not only the institutional church. Instead of simply looking at life from the personal perspective, as autonomous human beings, pursuing our own personal careers with no obligations beyond their own individual families, Luther advocated for a larger and more pervasive understanding of work and vocation.

Defining vocation as simply our job or our occupation is very restrictive. It makes it largely self-serving actions. But when we see vocation or work from a larger perspective, responding to such a calling allows God to sanctify us and empty us so that service in the name of Christ will be our focus.

Luther said: “*all the tasks of one's life, any Christian's life, no matter how menial or mundane the tasks performed, provide an opportunity to express one's faith.*” Luther emphasized repeatedly that we are not justified and loved for our activity in the sacred or religious realm. We are justified and loved rather on account of God's saving activity in Jesus Christ.

The upshot of this is that **no occupation is outside the presence of God's redemptive activity, and no occupation has a special place in God's heart as compared to another.**

In other words, we can't all be pastors, or relief workers, missionaries, or church leaders. But every one of us has gifts that can bear God's fruit.

These gifts are sometimes called “*strengths*” on those personality tests, or on annual performance reviews. Sometimes these strengths are not even part of your job, but they do help others through care and concern, through attention or time, through generosity and openness.

Whether your job is in a cubical, in a truck, or in a corner office . . . whether you're working hourly, on salary, or just too much . . . every day at work is an opportunity to grow, to share, to encourage, and to forgive. So, FEARLESS LIVING AT WORK can be an exciting adventure!

So what about your work! Is it just a job? Is it just something you do for now with the hope of having something you really like doing in the future? Is it simply going through the motions or is what you are doing, part of something bigger and do you feel connected in your work and your faith! Is it something you do because it has a great retirement plan? Or do you see in your work the possibilities of “vocation” . . . living out your faith . . . being a “*little Christ*” to others!

I would like to suggest to you this morning that FEARLESS LIVING AT WORK means a couple of obvious things. It means:

- Daring to live into your strengths, whatever they are.
- Daring to see your job not as just getting by, but as Christ’s work in the world.

Here are some other questions to reflect on, as you think about your job and the people that you have contact with each day . . .

- How can you serve people at your work?
- What simple ministries of friendship and care can you bring to your work?
- What strengths can you live into better at your work?
- How does your life at work live out your faith?
- What are you good at, that helps the kingdom of God come to reality?

When you think about your job, your occupation, your career . . . Are you afraid of something related to your work? Are you afraid of your boss? Are you afraid of the expectations of your job? Are you afraid you are not measuring up? Are you afraid of losing your job? Are you afraid of being the authentic person God has called you to be?

Bill Hybels tells a personal story about his own experience in the workplace as he practiced FEARLESS LIVING AT WORK. One day, as he was coming into his office after an especially busy morning, with stacks of projects and e-mails and phone calls waiting for him, he passed the office of one of his staff colleagues.

He knew that this particular staff member was struggling with some leadership issues and with some heavy demands in his ministry. As he came up to his office, he felt a prompting from the Holy Spirit to stop for a moment and say a few encouraging words to this person.

Instead of going directly to his own office, where his own work was piling up, he acting on that prompting and entered the office of his colleague. He spent probably no more than 10 minutes in conversation with him, encouraging and affirming his leadership and thanking him for his efforts.

He left that office and headed down the hall to his own office and stopped for a cup of coffee. As he sat down, his phone lit up with a call. He answered and it was the staff member he had just talked to. He had left a voice mail and the message went like this: *“You have no idea how I needed those few minutes you gave to me this morning. It was an answer to prayer. It was just what I needed to hear. Thank you for your encouragement and your understanding and most of all for your time.”*

That is FEARLESS LIVING AT WORK . . . a brief conversation that may uplift a fellow-worker . . . a kind word to a customer that seems to be having a difficult day . . . a listening ear to a stranger who has come into your place of work for a totally different reason . . . a spirit of compassion and concern to someone who needs to hear a word of GRACE in their life. To set aside your needs and listen to the needs of others.

There are so many specific things you can do to experience FEARLESS LIVING AT WORK . . . but so many of them simply have to do with a shift from focusing on your personal needs and moving into the needs of those around you!

So, what keeps us from doing these things? I want to suggest this morning that the most debilitating inhibitor in all of this is FEAR. When we are afraid for our own situation, for our own security, for our own job or for our own needs, it is hard to be there to help others. So how do we remove our FEAR and enter in to FEARLESS LIVING AT WORK?

- Identify when fear is driving you AND THEN, step out of that fear and respond from a place of freedom and self awareness
- Let go of false expectations of yourself and false expectations that others have of you.
- Transform your negative language and limiting beliefs. When you continue to talk about your job as something you don't like, it becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy. Negative language produces negative thoughts!
- Replace negative self-talk with acknowledgements
- Let go of excuses, become more accountable and improve self esteem
- Begin to look at your job as a way in which you can serve others, rather than simply a way of earning a living.
- Work on improving all of your relationships – personal, public, work-related
- Develop an attitude of gratitude.

### **Are you too comfortable in your job?**

Many of us have settled into a comfortable pattern about our work. We don't necessarily love our job or even like it, but it pays the bills and helps build our egos. But FEARLESS LIVING AT WORK means that there is something more.

Is what you do JUST a job to retire from? Or do you want to do activities each and every day which you love and never have to stop until you die? It has been said that the only people who retire, are people who don't love what they do. Are you one of them? The reality is that you can live a more FEARLESS LIFE AT WORK, but the changes reside within you.

Our Lesson from I Corinthians 12:4-6 reminds us . . . *“There are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of working, but it is the same God who inspires them all in every one.”*

### **Will this change be hard work?**

Changing your perspective or attitude about your work may be the hardest thing you have ever done. You will have to confront external attitudes about work. These attitudes will come from co-workers, bosses, spouses and mother-in laws, all people with whom you are in relationship. Next, you may lack the self confidence to stand up for your new attitude. But it all starts with you!

Can you think of someone who you have been around who has a great attitude about their work? How can you try on a similar attitude about your work? Our beliefs about work may have to go. Many of us have beliefs about work which just don't fit us any longer but we hold on to them like an old familiar coat. So what can you do now?

Craig Nathanson is the author of *P Is For Perfect: Your Perfect Vocational Day*. He is also a coaching expert who works with people in mid-life. He suggests some basic steps for making your work more than just a job, but actually a vocation!

**Expect** to find happiness in your work, if you are prepared to search for it.

**Delete** old thought patterns and attitudes about work that are no longer useful . . . and don't expect anyone else to change your attitude for you

**Practice** daily a new attitude about your work, but expect resistance from others

**Discard** as quickly as possible negative thoughts about your work. Instead, change your own work patterns

**Don't settle** for unfulfilling work and work without meaning in your life

**Create** an inner awareness your life can be authentic, happier and more satisfying

**Smile** and laugh more!

**Discover** and do what you love!

**Implement** a consistent daily attitude, which is the same in the morning and at night. You'll feel calmer about yourself as a result

As has been said in the context of healthy living . . . **Have more fruit on your cereal!** More fruits and vegetables and whole grains are great for our diet and health. Maybe in your own personal life, you may have adopted a new diet, a new exercise schedule and maybe your relationships are improving and you might even be sleeping better. What possibly can be even better than this?

Re-creating a new attitude about your work will be like adding fruit on your cereal in the morning. It will put a smile on your face and a bounce to your step. **FEARLESS LIVING AT WORK** might just be what you need the most!