

SERMON FOR JULY 16, 2017  
TEXT: JOHN 5:17  
THEME: EMBRACING OTHERS

But Jesus answered them, “My Father is working until now, and I am working.”

In the name of Jesus:

Luann and I just got back from our vacation last night and we were LAZY. That is right, we didn't do anything, except relax by the pool, go to the beach and read, spend time with our kids and grandchildren, and overall we didn't do anything worthy of being called work. That is what vacations are for, to take time off from work. Vacations are meant to be a time of laziness. However, laziness is not meant to be a way of life, especially for the life of a Christian.

Today it seems that more and more people have an aversion to work. I went out to pick up a sandwich at a well know local eating establishment a few weeks ago and I was talking to the owner, who was telling me that he has to close his eatery for the next several months. Why? In large part, because he can't find anyone who wants to work! People today want others to do the work for them, they don't want to do the work themselves. We live in different times, and the times we live in are marked by amusement. People want to be amused rather than work.

Amusement takes many forms: the theater, television, movies, a sporting event, just to name a few. Despite the many forms of amusement today, the meaning of the word amusement is singular. What exactly does this word, amusement, mean? It literally means without a muse. In the ancient world, a muse was thought to be the source of creativity, ingenuity, and invention. Muses were supposed to generate thought,

inspiration and ideas for poets, musicians, and writers. New ideas were thought to be the gift of the muse. Amusement, therefore, is actively seeking to be without a muse. It is choosing to be mindless, thoughtless, unengaged, and checked out. So, based on the meaning of the word amusement, all we really want is a brain that is a vacuum. We participate in amusements so that we can stop thinking. We binge watch television shows so that we can disengage our imagination. Kids play video games because someone has already done all of the creative thinking. We watch sporting events, instead of participating in sporting events, because it is easier to shove popcorn in our mouths and watch instead of getting off the couch and actually participating in the activity.

Why are we so fixated on amusement? It is because we are all lazy. Now, before you get all put off and insulted, hear me out! Being lazy is a result of sin. God didn't make humans to be lazy, rather we became lazy as a result of man's rebellion against God. Sin alienated us from fruitful labor, throwing a cog in God's creation. Sin has forced us to sweat, do hard labor, and have difficulty trying to scratch out a living. It wasn't supposed to be that way. God, you see, created man to work.

Remember the reason why God placed Adam in the Garden? <sup>15</sup> The Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to work it and keep it." But man disobeyed God and sin entered the world. Sin destroyed God's perfect work of creation. And work became, well, work. "“Because you have listened to the voice of your wife and have eaten of the tree of which I commanded you, ‘You shall not eat of it,’ cursed is the ground because of you; in pain you shall eat of it all the days of your life; <sup>18</sup> thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you; and you shall eat the plants of the field. <sup>19</sup> By the

sweat of your face you shall eat bread, till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; for you are dust, and to dust you shall return.”

The legacy of how sin has spoiled work is legendary. Plant a garden and watch the plant shrivel on the vine. Start a health routine and sprain an ankle. Enroll in college and go into debt to pay for it. Start a family and then come to the realization that it is difficult to be a wife, or a husband, or parent. Life is all about taking one step forward and two steps back. Life is hard, its hard work.

God could have taken the easy way out, but didn't. That is why God sent Jesus, to do the work necessary for you to be saved. God's plan of salvation required that Jesus embrace sinners. That is why He became one of us yet without sin. Jesus' life and ministry required work. Jesus worked hard to undo the mess that sin created. Lame people came to Jesus to walk. Deaf came to Him asking to hear. The mute had no voice until Jesus did His work. Lepers were social outcasts but Jesus embraced them. Jesus undid the work of sin by living His perfect life for you and offering Himself up on the cross for the payment of all of your sin. Jesus accomplished all He needed to do to make you His child through His life, suffering, death, and resurrection.

Jesus came to work to earn your salvation, so that you don't have to. Your salvation is given to you as a free gift. Jesus forgives you all of your sins, including the sin of being lazy, and now gives you new life so that you would be freed from being lazy. Jesus has given to you salvation, full and free, and now gives to you the work, His work, of sharing His salvation with your neighbor. You are freed from working for your salvation, so that now that you are saved, you can work for your neighbor.

This is a unique Lutheran understanding. Before the Lutheran Reformation, the Catholic Church at that time taught that good works were vital for your salvation. Faith in Jesus wasn't enough; you had to perform good works in order to get into heaven. So Christians began to look at life and live life differently in that if you helped an old lady across the street, this would be points in your favor as you earned your way to heaven. Caring for your neighbor was an opportunity to get more points. And on and on it went. This teaching of good works being necessary to salvation concerned Martin Luther, because he believed that the Bible clearly taught that you were saved by God's grace through faith in Jesus Christ and not by works. So then, if this was true, that you were saved by grace, what part did good works play in the life of a Christian? Certainly not to win favor with God! God loves sinners and forgives sinners because of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection.

As Luther read the Bible he began to clearly understand what the Bible taught about good works. Luther wanted people to understand that they were freed in Jesus Christ to do good works, not for your own personal benefit, but for the benefit of others. In his work: "On Christian Freedom" Luther summarized the Bible's teaching in this way: You are freed in Jesus Christ to do good to your neighbor. He wrote two well known statements that capture Biblical teaching, and it would serve you well to remember these two statements:

1. A Christian is a perfectly free lord and subject to none and
2. A Christian is a perfectly dutiful servant, and subject to all

Both of these statements come from the Bible. In I Cor 9:19 we read:

<sup>19</sup>For though I am free from all, I have made myself a servant to all, that I might win more of them.” And in Romans 13:8 we read: “Owe no one anything, except to love each other, for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law.” So how does this work? Simply like this: You are free from working for your salvation. That has been won, guaranteed all because of Christ. As a result of being saved, now God gives you freedom to work for your neighbor.

Because God has earned your salvation, you don't need to do anything to be saved. Christ has done it all. God doesn't need your good works. But your neighbor does. Seeing that God has made you a new creature in Christ, you now are free to serve your neighbor with acts of love. God has saved you in Jesus Christ, not to be lazy, but to be at work for the welfare of those around you. The old sinful you wants to be lazy, wants to sit on the sidelines and not be involved in the betterment of the welfare of those around you. But God has made you a new person in Baptism; all so that you will serve your neighbor, indeed, work for your neighbor in love.

Being Lutheran is working hard for others. BEING LUTHERAN IS ABOUT EMBRACING OTHERS. Being Lutheran is not about earning salvation, it is about sharing that salvation in doing things for others. It shouldn't come, then, as a surprise that Lutherans throughout history have done amazing things in working for others. That is why Lutherans have been family oriented, because Luther taught that the Bible reveals that the foundation for a person is found in the family. If you really want to help others,

begin by being a good parent, for as Luther put it: “we can do no better work and do nothing more valuable for God, for Christendom, for the entire world, for themselves, and for their children than to bring their children up well.” Being a loving neighbor starts at home, in the family. But it extends from there.

Just look at the history of Redeemer. Why was this congregation started? To begin a day school, and it continues today with the important ministry of early childhood education. Growing up in Cleveland, I had the privilege of being brought into the Lutheran Church through the Lutheran day school, and had the honor of going to both Lutheran High Schools in Cleveland. Our Church has Lutheran colleges around the country and the Lutheran church has universities around the world, all in an effort to provide quality Christian education to everyone.

In some of the larger cities in America, you will find Lutheran hospitals. Lutherans have a long legacy of opening hospital to help care for the sick and to touch them with the healing hand of Christ. Our congregation is a member of Lutheran Social services, and LSS seeks to help to provide assistance to those who suffer from hunger, homelessness, and domestic abuse. Whenever there is a disaster around the globe, the first people to show up on the scene are Lutherans, through the agencies of Lutheran Disaster Response and Lutheran World Relief.

There are many more ways in which Lutherans have been involved in working for the betterment of others. What about you? Are you a student studying hard to complete an assignment? A parent cleaning up a mess after your kids? A grandparent changing the diaper of your infant grandchild? Whatever God has you to do, do it with joy,

because God has created you in Christ to do good for those around you. Lutherans aren't lazy, Lutherans EMBRACE OTHERS BY doing the work God has for them to do, wherever they are called to do it. So, in whatever you do, whether in word or in deed, do it to the glory of God, and in Jesus name!

Amen