

CALLED TO SERVE

May 12, 2024

Rev. Mark F. Bartels

First Lesson; 1 John 4:13-21

Psalm of the Day; Psalm 124

Second Lesson; John 17:11b-19

Sermon Text; Acts 1:15-26

The text for today is taken from Acts, chapter one, verses fifteen through twenty-six.

In those days Peter stood up among the believers (a group numbering about a hundred and twenty) and said, “Brothers and sisters, the Scripture had to be fulfilled in which the Holy Spirit spoke long ago through David concerning Judas, who served as guide for those who arrested Jesus. He was one of our number and shared in our ministry.”

(With the payment he received for his wickedness, Judas brought a field; there he fell headlong, his body bust open and all his intestines spilled out. Everyone in Jerusalem heard about this, so they called that field in their language Akeldama, that is, Field of Blood.)

“For,” said Peter, “it is written in the book of Psalms:

“May his place be deserted;
let there be no one to dwell in it,'

and,

“May another take his place of leadership.'

“Therefore it is necessary to choose one of the men who have been with us the whole time the Lord Jesus was living among us, beginning from John's baptism to the time when Jesus was taken up

from us. For one of these must become a witness with us of His resurrection.”

So they nominated two men: Joseph called Barsabbas (also known as Justus) and Matthias. Then they prayed “Lord, you know everyone's heart. Show us which of these two you have chosen to take over this apostolic ministry, which Judas left to go where he belongs.” Then they cast lots, and the lot fell to Matthias, so he was added to the eleven apostles.

These are Your words, Heavenly Father. Lead us in the way of truth. Your Word is truth.

Amen

As a pastor, I meet a lot of people. When I meet people, at some point in the conversation I ask this question? “*What do you do for work?*”

Sometimes I get answers that just make my heart hurt a little bit. Sometimes people begin the answer to that question this way. They say, “*I am just a...*”

Like, “*I am just a cashier at a grocery store.*” Or, “*I am just an aide at a nursing home.*” Or, “*I am just a custodian at a factory.*” Or, “*I am just a stay-at-home mom.*”

Now, if I would ask ask those same persons, “*What do you do for work?*”, I am sure, if they had a different profession, they would not say something like this (*in fact, I have never heard anybody say this*) “*I am just a doctor.*” “*I am just a lawyer.*” “*I am just a professor.*”

You know, in our hearts I think sometimes we think there are certain vocations, or callings in life that are higher, more important, more significant, and have more meaning in life. In fact, in Martin Luther's day it was the same way. There was the opinion that if you had a job in the church, you had a more significant job than anybody else. If you were a priest, or a bishop, a monk, or a nun, and served

in one of those holy orders, society considered you to have one of the most significant, important roles in life. And, if you weren't in a church-ly office, you would say something, *"I am just a peasant."* *"I am just a councilmen."* *"I am just a tradesmen."* As if those weren't significant roles to be in.

Martin Luther loved The Bible. He studied The Bible, and he found passages that made him reevaluate that whole picture. For example, here is a passage.

**“The eyes of all look to You
and You give them their food at the proper time.”**

So, Martin Luther said, *"The Bible clearly, clearly, clearly teaches us that God feeds us."* Right?

Then, Martin Luther asked the big question. *"How does he do it? How does God feed us?"*

Martin Luther gave this wonderfully endearing, little answer. *"It is through the Milkmaid who milks the cows that God works to put milk on your table. God feeds you through the Milkmaid."*

Luther even went so far as to say, *"It is like God takes care of all of these things in our lives. He takes care of our health. He takes care of law and order. He takes care of the food we eat, and the clothes we wear, but He does it through people."*

How does He take care of your health? He gives you sanitation workers that make sure everything is clean so germs do not get spread. It is like God puts on 'a mask', and takes care of all of those things, but He does it through people, through their vocations.

So, Luther said that any calling you have in life is very significant. God has given every one of us different callings, or vocations in life. In the family you have a calling, multiple callings. You might be a son, daughter, husband, wife, a mother, or father. Those are your callings. God works through those callings to serve other people. In your vocation, your earthly job, you can have multiple, multiple jobs, and God works through those to take care of people's needs.

He serves people through those.

In the church, you could be a pastor, a teacher, on a board, or a committee. Those are roles that God has assigned you. Through those roles He takes care of all of our needs.

So, we do not believe any role you have in life is insignificant, at all. God works through those to take care of people's needs.

There are only fourteen people in the history of the world, who, if you asked, "*What do you do for a job?*" would have answered it this way. "*I am an Apostle.*" Only fourteen people in the entire history of the world could have said, "*I am an Apostle.*"

Those fourteen people were the twelve original disciples. The Bible tells us Jesus took those twelve original disciples, and designated them '*Apostles*', which means, '*one who is sent out*'. We also know Judas lost his position of Apostleship. Today we find out a man by the name of Mathias became an Apostle. That makes thirteen.

Later, we find out St. Paul became an Apostle. That makes fourteen people in the history of the world who were Apostles.

Now, what is an Apostle? What is the role of an Apostle?

**“God wants all men to be saved,
and come to the knowledge of the truth.”**

He sent Jesus to die on the cross to pay for the sins of the world.

God wants everybody to know, everybody to know that Jesus died for their sins.

How does He do that? He does that through vocations, through jobs. He assigned fourteen men to be with Him from the beginning of His ministry, witness His miracles, His teaching, His suffering and dying, and His resurrection. He assigned them, then, to be the ones who would go out in the world, and begin telling the world, "*This is what Jesus did for you*", and attest to the fact that they saw the resurrection.

Here is what I want you to realize today. God has given you different roles in your life.

- Maybe you are a mom, a dad, maybe you are a son, or daughter.
- You have different jobs you work at out in the community.
- You have different roles here at church.

Did you know probably most of the sins we commit are in our vocations, or our callings that God has given us? Judas is a prime example of that, a prime example. Judas was given the role in his life, as a vocation of being an apostle. He had been given this assignment by God to be a witness of everything Jesus did, hear His teaching, see His death, see His resurrection, and then go out, and begin to tell people about that. It was all in the role of serving other people, serving God by serving other people, and telling them about Jesus.

But, Judas had a heart, instead of wanting to serve other people, he used the role God had given him, to serve himself. He became selfish, and self-centered. The Bible tells us he was a lover of money. He was the treasurer for the disciples, and he used to help himself to the money. Then, The Bible tells us that he saw his role as an apostle as an opportunity to make even more money. He came up with this dastardly plan to betray Jesus. He knew where Jesus went. He knew where He frequented. He determined to betray Jesus for thirty pieces of silver. And, that is exactly what he did. He failed in the role God had assigned him. It came at a massive price to Judas. The massive price was he had this incredibly guilty conscience, once he realized he had failed in his role that God had assigned him.

The same, in our lives. I can't tell you how many times I have had somebody in my office, who has looked at their God assigned role (*maybe it is a mom, or a dad, a husband or a wife, a son, or a daughter*), and with tears in their eyes looked at me, and said *"Pastor, I have failed. I have failed in the role God has given me. I was too harsh."* *"I was too concerned about myself."* *"I did not sacrifice the way I should have."* *"I didn't love the way I should*

have.” *“I didn't talk about my faith the way I should have And, now there are consequences that have happened.”*

People can feel incredible guilt, because of the fact that we are not perfect in the roles God has assigned us. Our hymnbook even has a little section where, as you prepare for The Lord's Supper, it says, ***“What if you can't think of any sins you have committed?”***

It says,

“Just look at the roles God has assigned you. How have you been as a husband? How have you been as a wife? How have you been as a son, or a daughter? How have you been as a mom, or a dad?”

It doesn't take long to see we have failed in the roles God has assigned us to serve other people.

Now, Judas, Judas made a massive, massive, **massive mistake**. The massive mistake he made was this. He thought that because he failed in his role God had assigned to him, that God did not love him. He thought, “There is no way, no way God loves me”, and he wanted to get rid of a guilty conscience.

-He threw the money back into the temple, but that did not get rid of his guilty conscience.

-He confessed his sins to the priest, but that did not get rid of his guilty conscience.

-He took his life, but that did not get rid of his guilty conscience.

You see, he thought, *“God does not love me, and He can't love me.”*

He thought God's love was conditional.

I am going to tell you something that happened to me personally, as a young boy. *(We have probably all have felt like this, on occasion.)*

I remember very distinctly I had failed my mom and dad. I don't even remember what it was that I did, but I felt like I was a bad son.

I felt like, *“They must not love me very much at all, if at all.”*

Plus, there were other things about myself that made me think other people probably didn't really care about me, and didn't love me that much.

I remember one day, (*I went to a little, parochial school*), I went to chapel. Now, God loves us dearly, and He wants us to know how much He loves us, so He assigns people the role of making sure we know that. Well, it just so happened I went to chapel, and God had seen to it that this guest pastor was teaching at chapel that day. This guest pastor did something I will never forget. He had a bunch of strings in his pocket, a bunch of long strings. He held on to one, and gave it to one kid. Then, he held on to another one, and gave it to a kid. He had another one, and gave it to a kid. (*There were like five strings.*)

He said, *“These strings tell you why I love you. This one is connected to this really good looking guy. I love him, because he is good looking. This one is connected to this really smart girl. I love her, because she is really smart. This one is connected to this funny guy. I love him, because he is really fun to be around. This one is connected to this student, because he is always good in class. I love him, because he is so good in class.”*

Then he said, *“I have all of these strings attached to people. That is why I love them. But, if he is not good looking,”* then he let go of the string, *“then I don't love him, anymore. If she is not smart,”* then he let go of the string, and said, *“I don't love her, anymore.”*

That is what I felt like. I felt like people don't love me, my mom and dad don't love me, and God doesn't love me, because I have been bad.

Then he said this. *“I want you to know that's not, that's not the kind of love God has for you. God's love does not have any strings attached, at all. It is unconditional.”*

The Bible uses the word **'agape'**. It is the word for **'no strings attached love'**. God looks at you, and He says, *“I love you. It doesn't matter what you look like. I love you period. It doesn't matter how smart you are. I love you, no matter what. It doesn't matter how fun you are to be around, or if you are not fun to be*

around. I love you, no matter what. It doesn't matter what you have done wrong. I love you no matter what. No strings attached."

I was listening to that, and then he said, "God says, 'I love you so much that no matter how big a sin you have committed, I love you so much, no strings attached, that I want you to be with me forever in Heaven. I love you so much that I will do whatever it takes. I will sacrifice whatever it takes for you to be with me in Heaven. I love you so much, and no strings attached, that no matter what you have done, I will take all of the sins you have committed, put them on my own Son, and at great cost to me, I will put my own Son to death to pay for your sins. That is how much I love you. And, because of what my Son has done, I don't see any of your sins. I love you unconditionally, no strings attached.'"

That was nothing but Gospel – Good News!

To this day, God worked through that pastor, through that man, to tell me something I needed to hear. We all need to hear that. All of our failures are forgiven. The Bible says,

**“We love,
because God first loved us.”**

Knowing what Jesus did for me, and how God loves me unconditionally, changes my heart. It causes me to say, *“Whatever role God assigns me in this life, whatever role, I want to unconditionally love the people God has put in my life, whether they are easy to love, or hard to love, whether it is a challenge, and a sacrifice. I want to serve them the way God intends me to serve them.”*

Look at what happened in today's scripture reading. Judas failed. Unfortunately, Judas did not think God could ever love him. Peter also failed in his vocation. Remember, he denied Jesus. But, Peter knew he was forgiven. And, Peter wanted to be a faithful Apostle, so he studied scripture. He said, *“Scripture says somebody needs to take Judas' place.”* He called the church together. And,

the church members were faithful in their calling, as church members. They asked, *“What is an apostle?”*

It had to be somebody who was with Jesus from the beginning of His ministry, at His baptism, and all the way through His ministry, and then saw His resurrection.

There were only two men in the group that were qualified - Mathias and Barsabbas.

They wanted to be faithful, so they prayed to God.

“Lord, you know everyone's heart. Show us which one of these men You have chosen...”

Then, they cast lots. The lot fell to Mathias. So, Mathias was given the vocation of being an apostle.

I want you to see what happened. Mathias did not choose the role he was in. God did. You did not choose who your mom is. God did. You did not choose who your children are going to be. God did. You did not choose your skills, and abilities. You didn't choose the people who were going to be brought into your life. You did not choose the circumstances that were going to happen. God did. He arranged them all to put you in certain roles in life, through which He serves people through you.

So, I want to end with this thought. One time I was at a nursing home, visiting a person in that nursing home. I walked into the nursing home, and into the memory care unit. As soon as the doors were unlocked, and I walked in, the air hit me. I could tell somebody in there really needed their diaper changed, a grown up needed their diaper changed. It was bad, and I felt sad for whoever it was.

I want to tell you something. God loves the man, that old man who was laying in that bed, and needed his diaper changed. God had redeemed that man with the blood of His own Son. God wanted to take care of that man. Do you know what God did? He put on 'a mask'. He put on 'a mask', and in a way we can say He walked into

that room, and through the hands of an aide in that room, He lovingly, and I mean lovingly, unconditionally, sacrificially changed that man's diaper. That is powerful.

Don't ever say, "*I am just a...*" OK? Whatever role God has assigned you, see it as a role that God has given to you to serve God by serving others.

Amen

Now may the peace of God, which passes all understanding keep our hearts, and our minds in Christ Jesus, our Lord.

Amen