

To Workers of All Kinds, To Employers

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and our *Lord* Jesus Christ,

Dear saints, you are not your own. And this is good. It is not good that man should be alone. He gave Eve to Adam. He gives parents to children, and children to parents. Neighbors to neighbors. He gives 2,000 employees and employers of Crayola to 50 million young children, and 50 million children to the 2,000 employees and employers of Crayola. He gives the employees and employers to each other to work together in a beautiful colorful harmony, and even the employers of Crayola are given their parent company of Hallmark Cards, Inc. and *their* 30,000 employees and employers.

You are not your own. You're in a community. You're in families. You're in congregations. You, CLC. Me, Faith. Us, the Southern Arizona Circuit of the English District of the LCMS of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of the body of Christ. This is good. We belong together. God put us together. He puts us in different stations in life, each according to His intricate and purposeful design.

You are each fearfully and wonderfully made, the hairs of your head numbered, and you are each put into communities and orderings to live as He fearfully and wonderfully made you to be. Working well, according to God's design, fathers are fatherly to their children, mothers motherly to their children who are themselves child-like. Learning. Submissive. As children and parents age, the duties may alter a bit, but the relationship remains. Husbands are husbandly to wives (sacrificial) wives are bridal to their husbands (helpers), till death, according to God's design from the

beginning. Shepherds require sheep. The flock of God hear God's voice through His chosen instruments: pastors. Families living alongside families, governed and protected by the rulers of our society, our civil government, who are called to serve we citizens. This is how God made us to live in our world, and this is good.

And, God gives us all talents, each according to, again, *His* design. To one, He gives five. To another, two. To another, one. To one, He gives ability to bake. To another, the ability to read and learn and teach what is read and learned, or to make and sell said books. To one, managing the household. To another, spiritually leading the household as the head.

Under God's design, with God's holiness, with God's blessing, with all of us working in the stations God places us and according to His instructions, wonderful beautiful commerce takes place. A need is experienced, and we quickly match up who can meet that need. Five talents make five talents more. Two talents two talents more. One talent invested with the bankers who share their talents of investing. And if I experience a need for a longer time, I have learned the secret. I can do all things through Christ who gives me strength. I have all things in Jesus. In any and every circumstance, I am content.

This world operates best when fitting into His design, His commandments, His duties. But we in this world don't like to operate at our best. We rebel against His design and are worse off for it. We want to move ourselves out of our families and communities and employment and make ourselves free to be an island to ourselves, that we shouldn't be defined by anyone else. We tell ourselves we should be independent, even

isolated, an individual with individual needs and desires. We should have the freedom to make our own choices and I should never be obligated by other people or defined by them. I convince myself that the path to happiness is being a self-made man. Self-sufficient, self-reliant. If you want something done right, do it yourself. No charity, lest I would have to give charity. No handouts, lest I would need to show my own hand and vulnerabilities to others. Independence and freedom. Master of my own fate: captain of my soul. Slave to nobody.

And if I flounder, well at least nobody can see me putting the blame on God, which is who we're pushing against. We find any way we can to be discontent, even putting to a pretty Disney *Beauty and the Beast* song how tired we are of the little town full of little people working every day like the one before, with the smiling baker, but no, he's got his tray *like always* and it's the *same old* bread and rolls to sell. We love to pity ourselves and our stations in life, set in place according to the Ten Commandments.

Well, people loved by God, repent. It doesn't matter if you disagree with the law of gravity. It doesn't go well if you push against God's design and try to walk off a roof. So just as knowledge of this gravity blesses us with in-tact bodies not pushing against gravity, so too are our callings and duties within them a precious gift from our heavenly Father to hear from Him what is best for us in this world and life.

He gives you callings, vocations, and God be praised. He gives us ways to love, which is more than your mere *job*. He makes us needy and gives us people to whom we can depend. He makes others needy and gives you the capability to be their help. And this is exactly how God intended it.

We are inherently selfish, so to our flesh He gives us the inconveniences of people in our lives to whom we belong, and to our *renewed* spirit, enlivened by the Gospel, we rejoice at the opportunity.

We rejoice that we can look at our boss or our colleagues and associates and not see a tool for our own gain, but see even Christ Himself, to love them as we seek to love Him, to serve them as we seek to serve Him. How can this be? How can you possibly go to work, entering in to your workplace singing a hymn like that of the Ten Commandments? How can you possibly endure day after day the yell of “hurry up!” or the harsh conditions of summer or a team that just doesn’t fit well together? *How* do you respond like you do to your cranky irritable boss with such kindness and submissiveness? *How* when you were told to make up a white lie story in order to defraud a customer did you find it in you to say with such meekness, “with all due respect, sir, I cannot do that.”

How, you say? It’s because I have Jesus. I have a greater hope. We can say to our coworkers, “I’m with you, our boss deserves none of our respect, our service, or obedience, but neither do I deserve any such good thing.” Yet even still, the Lord Jesus nevertheless loves me in spite of me, so I can love our boss in spite of him.

If I only show respect to him if he shows respect to me, then what good is that? If he held me to the same standard, he would show me no respect either. Respect and honor has to begin somewhere. It begins with Jesus for me, so this allows me to give it to our boss or to my perpetually groaning associate under me. Jesus says to love your enemies, and do good...expecting nothing in return...Be merciful, as He is merciful to us.

Yeah, so what if I go unappreciated. I'm an unworthy servant. I'm only doing what is my duty. After all, Jesus completed the work of salvation, yet it went largely unappreciated.

I didn't get all this as a kid. My first real job was Staples. I still remember my boss' name, Justin, and my favorite co-worker, Dwayne. I was that employee who thought of my boss as my master, and I was convinced that it was because my boss first saw me as his slave. I was thankless for my income, and I had this wretched idea that I told Dwayne about.

Our boss was always leaving post-it note reminders everywhere. So, let's give him a piece of his own medicine. Let's just plaster his door with grievances against him. That'll show him. I was so livid, but I give thanks that I happened to slip the idea to my father. He, as my father, could've let me have it, ring me a new one, but he chose instead to speak kindly, with a firm but caring expression, guided me in the right way, that you, Kurt, have no right to be treated well at all, but you do have the duty to serve with honor and integrity. Take the higher road, he told me... and he was right. I didn't do it. I thank him that he took on that role as father to me, not withholding the rightful discipline I needed.

Ultimately my original thinking did cause my brother to stumble, as Dwayne was later fired for carrying out what was originally my idea. "Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!" For you who are retired and all of these employment duties are yesteryear, the Lord Jesus assumes your sins – your lack of submission against your employers, or your lack of

sacrifice for your employees – and He died with your very real specific sins in His real specific body. He paid your price. He paid your ransom, purchasing you from slavery under sin, under the accuser, under the burden slavemaster of the Law, and has brought you to belong to Him whose yoke is easy and His burden light, where you find rest for your souls.

He frees you from the slavery of being under the Law, under its threatening and oppressive punishing hand, and now you have the privilege of being a slave to Christ *within* the Law. That is, you are freed by God to now live as the Son He created you to be. Before God, you are given mercy. And now, in the world, you can have your focus where God would have it, not on God to earn heaven, but on your neighbor to bring heaven to them *now*.

*“...but like slaves of Christ, doing the will of God from your heart. Serve wholeheartedly.”*¹ Wholeheartedly. From the heart of faith, give everything you are because of Jesus who has given you everything He is. Do such good unto the least deserving of these, and you do it unto Him. Whoever would be great in your workplace must first be the servant, and whoever would be first among you must be slave of all. For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many. You *were* bought with a price, not with gold or silver, but His holy precious blood, and His innocent suffering and death.

¹ *Ephesians 6:6b.*

Likewise, bosses. Employers. Masters. Do the same. Even though you're over them, become their servant. Ask their needs. Sacrifice whatever creature comforts you can for them. For to both employer and employee, the workplace is *not* to make ourselves wealthy, or to put ourselves in a higher status above others, but in order to serve those to whom the Lord gives us the privilege of serving.

As much as we Lutherans love our distinctions, push back against the hard "for-profit" and "not-for-profit" distinction. My daughter's life wouldn't have as much of the joy and color that it has if it weren't for the for-profit Crayola company, whose profits they get from us get reinvested into bettering the product for more kids, and for their employees to provide for their own families.

Push back as well against the idea that the workers are always the good guys and the supervisors are always the bad guys. Push back that the workers always have the right to demand certain things of their employers, and that employers are always the bad guys who are always hoarding and so have to give their fair share to workers. Each is called to be yoked together in love for the benefit of the other. Instead of the picket line, say instead in prayer, "I want my employer's business to succeed, so that he can then employ others."

Christian employers are to see their business as a great opportunity to employ many and help them and be of service to them. Christian employees buy into the mutual service of employer and employee not for one's own sake, but for Christ's sake. The prayer of the Employer is, "I give thanks to you, O God, that you have so blessed me with this business that

is this large and prosperous. Thanks that I am through this blessing able to employ hundreds and hundreds of workers so that I can give them a livelihood to provide for their families and be of service to others.”

For as Paul says, every master has a master. Together, both slave and master, we have Christ as our ultimate Master. He’s the master of mercy, the master of compassion, the master who gave everything for our salvation, purchasing and winning us from the slavery of sin, death and the power of the devil. With his holy precious blood, he paid the price. He paid the ransom.

For what purpose? As it says in the catechism, “That I may be His own.” Though I am free from all, I may make myself a servant to all, and especially to Christ, and serve Him joyfully in everlasting righteousness, innocence, and blessedness. To God be the Glory, to us be the comfort. To our neighbor be our good works. Amen.

Lent I Wednesday

Ephesians 6:5-9, Matthew 8:5-13, Table of Duties

February 24, 2021

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Faith Lutheran Church, Tucson, AZ