

Dear members and friends of St. John Lutheran,

Serving the Lord is an interesting thing. First, we might try to grasp the concept of serving One that we can only know by faith – not by sight. It's kind of like getting instructions in the mail from someone we've never met face to face. We serve, but still it takes trust in the One we're serving – never having seen Him – but knowing that He's there. Knowing that He only wants what is best for us. Knowing that He died on the cross for us, so that we could be free from guilt, and empowered to serve Him.

Next, is the **abiding in Jesus** part. We are to remain connected to the Vine, Jesus Christ, and draw strength and power from His presence in our lives (see John 15:1-11). This abiding in Jesus, is the opposite of self-satisfaction and self-centeredness. God is actively killing the old self, that old Adam in each of us, and replacing our old nature with the New Self. This New Self no longer wants to sin, but instead desires to grow closer to God. And yes, to accomplish His will for our lives. We spend time in the Word of God, we receive the Lord's Supper when offered, and we remain connected to the Vine, Jesus Christ. This connection with our Lord provides us with a growing and more intimate knowledge of God's Law. This is the Law that functions as a mirror and as a guide. As a 'mirror' it leads us to repent. As a guide, it's like an operating manual for good living. Of course the Bible doesn't answer every conceivable question that comes up in life, but God changes our minds so that we are able to think like Christ. He's busy giving us a mind that can *reason* His will, even when the Bible does not specifically address the problem at hand.

Next, there's the **gifts and talents** part of the equation. We each have skills that allow us to function in this world. All of us are different, but we all have the capability to serve, in whatever capacity God desires. We shouldn't be envious of other people's abilities, nor use our seeming lack of ability as an excuse to avoid serving God. We have gifts and talents, and they were given to us for a reason.

Finally, God places us in **relationship** with other people. He gives us *neighbors*. Luther refers to our relationship with others as *vocations*. God places us in relationships that allow us to serve, using the skill set that He provides. People are also there to *serve you*. Your vocations are many in this life, like being a sibling, a friend, a neighbor, a worker, a spouse, grandparent, etc. But in all of these vocations, God has gifted you to be able to serve them.

Put all of this together and you've got **the anatomy of a Christian** who serves his Father in heaven. Of course sin still creeps in, where only good was supposed to be, and we fail to do God's will completely. But good happens, and we manage to do good works that are pleasing to our Father in heaven.

The key ingredient in all of this – the one thing that makes it all work: **Faith in Jesus Christ**. Faith leads us to repent when we fall into sin and our conscience bears witness to that sin. Faith leads us to trust in God's Word, and seek to carry out the essence of God's Law – to love God with all our heart, and soul, and mind, and to love our neighbor as ourselves (cf. Matt 22:37-40). Faith enables us to step out and do things that we would otherwise try to avoid. Faith in Christ frees us from the

guilt and shame of past mistakes that would otherwise weigh us down and render us ineffective. Faith is the essential ingredient that trusts in God's goodness, and inspires us to serve.

The Bible is clear that **without saving faith in Christ, we cannot please God**. But faith as small as a mustard seed, is capable of great and wondrous things (cf. Luke 17:6). So rejoice this day, knowing that God is active in helping you accomplish His will. He's brought you to faith in His Son, Jesus. He has gifted you, and placed you in your church, where you can draw what you need from His Word. He has put you in relationship with others, where the real work of serving Him happens. And despite the sin that permeates our lives, we are able to accomplish His will.

Pastor Travis