

Dear members and friends of St. John Lutheran,

As Lutherans, we spend a great deal of our spiritual lives focusing on how **God justifies us**, declaring us forgiven in Christ Jesus. And rightly so. **Justification** is the very center of our **doctrine** (our set of Christian beliefs that frame our worship and life). All other beliefs and practices **radiate out** from the **doctrine of Justification**.

Justification is a legal term, essentially declaring sinners like you and me to be “not guilty,” because of our faith in Jesus’ atoning work for us. Jesus takes on our sins and dies with them, while giving us His perfection, His righteousness. As faithful believers, **we live in a state of grace** (covered by His robe of righteousness), even though sin remains very much part of our existence.

But there’s another important doctrine in our Church that must be understood to fully appreciate the state of grace in which we live. That doctrine is called **sanctification**. Sanctification comes from the root, “sanctify,” which means **to be made holy, or perfect**. Jesus Christ is perfect. We are not. But since our adoption into His Church through Holy Baptism, **God has been at work through His Spirit to make us more like His Son**.

Essentially, God’s work in changing us to be more like Christ has many aspects. **Worship** plays a critical part as we hear His word, and we receive His very body and blood in His Supper. But a great deal of change happens through the circumstances of day-to-day life. Our **vocations**, where we are placed into relationships, the **hardships** that we must deal with, and even the **temptations** that we must face – **all play a part in our growing to be more like our Lord**.

Our **vocations** may be wonderfully fulfilling, as we see God use us to accomplish the good works that He has prepared in advance for us to complete. And yet, in our vocations, we are confronted with the reality of sharing our life with others – it’s not always a bowl of cherries! **Relationship problems** can tax us. **Our sin and the sin of others** complicates everything. And **temptations to sin** arise that can challenge us. **All of these can turn life into one big struggle!** Still, the desire of our heart is to please our Lord. We want to live our life in a way that brings honor to His holy name.

**So how does God use all of this to grow us to be more like His Son, Jesus?**

The Australian Lutheran theologian John Kleinig draws on Luther’s writings, as he describes how temptations, trials, and even assaults of the devil can **contribute to our sanctification**:

The devil’s attacks on us serves to strengthen our faith [grow our state of sanctification] because it drives us back to God’s Word as the only basis for spiritual

life. We cannot rely on our own resources in our battle against Satan and the powers of darkness. If we rely on our own wisdom and power, we will fail. In that situation, our only hope is in Christ and His Word. Our spiritual weakness makes us trust in the power of the Holy Spirit and the wisdom of God's Word...Through temptation we learn to seek help from God in meditation and prayer. We walk with Christ on the way of the cross; we discover the spirituality of the cross. We do not experience the splendor of union with our heavenly Lord, but we share in His suffering and pain. We bear the cross together with our Lord as we suffer with Him. Through the attacks of the evil one we are drawn further out of ourselves and deeper into Christ.<sup>1</sup>

Kleinig's last sentence points to the killing of our old sinful self, as we become more like Christ – that's the process of sanctification. This points to **our vocations as the place where we learn how to sacrifice ourselves for others. The primary purpose of God placing us in vocations is to serve our neighbor** (and not what the world says: for our personal fulfillment). Sacrificing for others teaches us self-discipline, and slowly kills our selfish ambitions and worldly desires.

**All of this flies in the face of what the world teaches about vocations.** Those jobs that are 90 percent drudgery, Luther would say are wonderful if we allow our Lord to guide us to recognize the good that is accomplished in hardship. Good works often require hardship, sweat, tears, and even boredom! **Our neighbor's good must be our focus**, even if the good we're accomplishing is hidden from our view. The garbage collector who keeps the community free from trash and disease. The custodian, who disinfects and cleans the building so that people can function in a healthy environment – these are great vocations of service to our neighbor! The mom or caregiver who changes the diapers and cleans up the messes, while keeping the household on track!

**As you go out into the community or work in your home, fulfilling your vocations, God is at work through the struggles, the hardships, and even the temptations to sin - to grow your reliance on Him.** As we grow, the old sinful self is killed, replaced by the new person in Christ. And so, we rejoice in the hardships and struggles – God is using these to grow us to be more like His Son. We share in His suffering and pain, and we are blessed. Amen.

Pastor Travis

(1) Kleinig, John, *Grace upon Grace*, CPH: St. Louis, c. 2008, p. 22.