

## THE ROAD WHERE FAITH IS FOUND

### SUMMON OUT WHAT I SHALL BE

EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN WORSHIP • 814

EMBRACING THE LEADERSHIP AND TALENTS  
OF GOD'S PEOPLE



Take, oh, take me as I am,  
summon out what I shall be;  
set your seal upon my heart  
and live in me.

—*Evangelical Lutheran Worship 814*

*Elaine Sauer writes...*

At baptism we are born into a life in the kingdom of God. It is a gift from God. Christ enters our lives, takes away our sinfulness and brings life into our hearts. We become members of a community of faith. Baptism begins the journey of faith that links us to others and to God. By God's grace and design we belong to one another.

In our baptism we are oriented towards life, towards life in and as the communion of saints.<sup>1</sup> In our baptism we find not only God's offer of grace and salvation but also God's call to recognize that every aspect of our lives is to be a response to God in thanksgiving for our life and in service with God in and for the world. This is what Martin Luther refers to as "vocation". "Filled with the Holy Spirit, we nourish one another: We are a cup of cold water for one another. We are poured out for the world, for Christ, for neighbour."<sup>2</sup>

At baptism we are called by God to serve God and others in our daily lives (Ephesians 4:1-13). But this is a concept that has not always been readily understood in the church. Baptism is often seen only as a ritual of welcome, of initiation into the community. Baptism is so much more than that. When we leave the community of faith, our congregations, each Sunday, we are sent from the community to remember our baptism to the world. "Remembering our baptisms is being present in the world as a people who have been encountered, confronted, immersed and resurrected."<sup>3</sup> God is calling us to be clothed in Christ, to be the memory of the body of Christ.

It's the memory work that trips up humans. We live in a world that expects our needs to be met, and expects to be fed and nourished with little effort on our part. In fact, the expectations of our western culture feeds on our lazy and forgetful attitudes about our calling as Christians in the world. We have somehow managed to separate our secular life from our faith life.

How have we done this? Scholars, writers, preachers alike could probably name those moments. Some will point to the fact that Sunday shopping has stolen the Lord's Day, that our opportunity to gather in worship as a community has been decimated to one hour per week, that the "Lord's Day has been stolen from the church."<sup>4</sup>

Others might say that we have become an "independent nation" unto ourselves, that we can do all and be all for ourselves, that we don't need God. When we look around the world, see what our western civilization has accomplished with our own hands! It seems that, in fact, our own daily work gives us more self respect and control in our lives than our relationship with God.<sup>5</sup> Our memory of our baptism gets lost in our own self importance in the world.

As a member of the faith community, however, we are given an opportunity to have reality check. As a member of the holy catholic church, we are challenged and supported to give pause in our daily lives, to recall the memory of our baptism. Together, in community, we can recall God's saving grace and be challenged to live out our baptismal vows.

In community we have an opportunity to hear the sounds of others, to breathe the breath of God into our lives so that we can be sent out into the world to be the living breathing body of Christ. The community of faith is the place where transformation takes place, where God's Word can nourish us, challenge us and lead us to live out in the world.

Kelly Fryer, in her book, *Reclaiming the C Word: Daring to Be Church Again*, talks a lot about the early church and what it was. She says it was a community that experienced Jesus Christ, that heard the gospel story, and then went out into the streets and told that story so that others would be blessed. They were so excited about the story that they just couldn't keep it for themselves but had to tell the story over and over and over again. And as people heard the message of Jesus Christ, they started sharing it in word and deed.

And then they would "come back together to praise and worship God and tell each other what they had seen and heard on the streets".<sup>6</sup> They were eager to come back together and tell about the amazing things God was doing in and through them, out on the streets (away from the temple, the church building). They were eager to be the church, not as an institution, but as the people of God, being the church wherever they lived, or worked or wherever they went.

I keep wondering what is holding us back from being that kind of church today. Again, we could blame it on our culture or environment but I don't think that is all of it. I think we have lost our ability to nourish each others gifts, to help each other recall our baptismal promises, to do the work of God, in partnership with each other, as a community of God.

Sometimes, we have left it to the professional leaders in the congregation, the pastors and diaconal ministers. We expect these leaders to do the parish visitations, be the single worship leader in the congregation, teach all areas of Christian education, and the list goes on and on. We have lost a sense of the "priesthood of all believers", that others who have gifts for hospitality, worship and care might have been robbed of the opportunity to share their gifts because we have a "paid employee" to do that on behalf of the congregation.

Years ago, in my first call as pastor, I worked with a group of young adults to lead worship. They were all musicians. I knew nothing of music, couldn't hold a tune, and sure couldn't tell the difference when one of them missed a note. So I sat before them and confessed my inadequacies and asked them for help. I don't remember their response in words, but body language told it all: what were they going to do with me? So we made an informal pact. I would provide the liturgical leadership, they would provide the music, and together we worked as a team to lead worship with up to one hundred youth on a monthly basis. Together we took a risk with each other and taught each other much about our own gifts and abilities.

The group changed over the years as people were lead in different directions and callings. At the present time I can name two who are in seminary, two who should be in seminary, one who is on church council in her congregation, one who with a new spouse, teaches church school and is a leader in the congregation, and one who is a wonderful mother. They are strong, courageous and confident young people in the church today because they recognized a call from God to use their abilities and gifts for others. They took a risk that the church had a place for them. They recognized that in their baptism God was calling them to serve, to respond.

It's not easy for young people to do that today. They are surrounded by a culture that draws them away from their faith, gives them permission to walk away from responsibility for others. They are afraid to "step on toes", take their place in the community for fear of offending or of not being accepted for who they are.

It is the church, the faith community that can give them a better choice. God calls the community of believers to reach out and challenge each human being to respond. In our preaching and teaching, in being church, we need to be equipping people to live out their baptism "out there", empowering people to be the church out in the streets and neighbourhoods. The church is the place where their gifts can be honed, strengthen and accepted.

The Holy Communion service in our *Evangelical Lutheran Worship* worship book offers us the opportunity for us to nurture and encourage the use of our gifts. It sees worship beginning with a *Thanksgiving for Baptism* as an alternative to *Confession and Forgiveness*. We are reminded of our rebirth: we recall our baptism and the familiar words wash over us again and again. It is an opportunity for the worshipping community to challenge one another to use the gifts God has given us and it is an opportunity to remember that God has gifted others to do the works of ministry with and for us as well.

Another helpful resource is to be found in the section of *Additional Prayers* (pages 72-87) in which a rite for *Affirmation of Christian Vocation* may be used in connection with the within the Sending at the conclusion of Holy Communion. This prayer may be used to recognize individuals who may be named, or for the whole assembly (*Evangelical Lutheran Worship*, page 84). This is an opportunity for the community to lift up peoples' baptismal calling, their vocation in the world. This is a way to engage the community in affirming one another's gifts for ministry outside of the church building. We are reminded of the profound Reformation witness to the *priesthood of all believers* within the Christian assembly and community.

Martin Luther's bold claim was that all the tasks of one's life, any Christian life, no matter how menial or mundane the task, provided an opportunity to express one's faith.<sup>7</sup> We are reminded that in all that we do and are, that in whatever context we are placed, we seek to enhance the lives of others and of our community and thereby contribute to God's good intentions for humanity.<sup>8</sup> As we have received God's gift of grace, we can turn our attentions to others as God intended and share the good news of God's grace.

By affirming the gifts in others, and by using the gifts we have been given by God, we contribute to the community and to the world and we build relationships with creation that God had intended for our own well-being and the well-being of the world.

In the words of John Bell —"Take, oh, take me as I am, summon out what I shall be; set your seal upon my heart and live in me."— we express the desire that we let God be God and use us as we were intended.

Thanks be to God.

+ Elaine

## Endnotes

1. Dirk G. Lange and Dwight W. Vogel, editors, *Ordo: Bath, Word, Prayer, Table*, p. 51.
  2. Lange & Vogel, p. 54.
  3. Lange & Vogel, p. 53.
  4. See Alvin, A. Rogness, *Living in the Kingdom: Reflections on Luther's Catechism*.
  5. D. Michael Bennethum, *Listen! God is Calling!*, p. 24.
  6. Kelly Fryer, *Reclaiming the "C" Word: Daring to Be Church Again*, p. 40.
  7. Bennethum, p. 45.
  8. Bennethum, p. 47.
- 

## Bibliography

- Bennethum, D. Michael. *Listen! God is Calling*. Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2003.
- Fryer, Kelly A. *Reclaiming the "C" Word*. Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2006.
- Lange, Dirk G. and Vogel, Dwight W. *Ordo: Bath, Word, Prayer, Table*. Akron: OSL Publications, 2005.
- Rogness, Alvin N. *Living in the Kingdom: Reflections on Luther's Catechism*. Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2005.
- 

*Elaine Sauer is Bishop of the Manitoba/Northwestern Ontario Synod, Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada.*

---

*In 2002, the ELCIC's Program Committee for Worship invited a number of bishops, pastors and teachers to write a series of pastoral letters under the title "Reclaiming Our Birthright: Pastoral Letters on the Every-Sunday Celebration of Holy Communion."*

*Introduced by Bishop Raymond Schultz, the letters had a two-fold thrust: They were designed to assist pastors and congregational leaders in their reflection and teaching on the matter of every-Sunday Holy Communion and to help the people of God to faithfully and deliberately reclaim their baptismal birthright.*

*These essays, together with all of the essays in this The Road Where Faith Is Found series, are available on the ELCIC + Worship Matters page at Lift Up Your Hearts [www.worship.ca](http://www.worship.ca).*