

Discipleship, Everyone?

We are called to discipleship, to follow Jesus, it is said -- to a kind of discipline, to walk in his steps, to deny ourselves, take up our cross. What can this mean in concrete terms?

Sometimes references are made to various Bible verses – to turn the other cheek, to sell all you have and give it to the poor, to visit those in prison, to feed the hungry, and many more.

In a certain sense we depend on our churches to develop programs so that we can get with the program and live the Christian life both at home and at work. Does it really work? Do we really do it? Do we do it with joy?

It turns out to be a struggle and one more thing we have to do in addition to the dishes, the laundry, and getting to work on time. Do we get a “power surge”?¹ Purpose in 40 days?² A “centered life”?³

There has to be a **better way**. And there is. It starts with distinguishing between law and gospel, which is basic to our Lutheran heritage. The law shows us our need of a savior, and the gospel shows us the Savior we need. And the Savior we need is the one who finished salvation on the cross.

Therefore we are free. Through baptism we have entered into “the glorious freedom of the children of God” (Rom 8:21). “If the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed” (John 8:36).

How does this shape the Christian life? It is neither a discipline, nor discipleship, nor a system of do’s and don’t’s for Christians who are “real” Christians. “The law says ‘do this,’ and it is never done. Grace says, ‘believe in this,’ and everything is already done” (*Heidelberg Thesis #26*; LW 31:56).

Each one of us is **called** by law and gospel and therefore given a **calling**. We are put where we are in this world of space and time to point to Him and to oppose the evil around us in our particular situations. As Luther famously said, “We are perfectly free Lords of all, subject to none, and perfectly dutiful servants of all, subject to all” (LW 31:344).

On the one hand, the Lord’s will is done even locally without our prayer. We are free from the burden of having to build the kingdom. On the other hand, because we are free from sin and death and from the worry about past, present, or future (simultaneously and totally justified and sinful), we are **free to take care of our neighbor**, to fight the powers of evil. As homemakers, factory workers, judges, and engineers, we use our common reason (Rom 13:10).

In the conflicts and ambiguities of life we will at times do the wrong thing, but we are forgiven through the cross. 1) The real temptations are **spiritual pride and spiritual despair**, thinking that we are building the kingdom (good people doing good), or that everything we do is useless. 2) Because we live by faith alone in the cross alone, **the result of what we do is hidden** both to others and to us, for we live by faith alone and

¹ Michael Foss, *Power Surge*.

² Rick Warren, *The Purpose Driven Life*.

³ Mark Fortin, *The Centered Life: Awakened, Called, Set Free, Nurtured*. Fortin is the Executive Director of Luther Seminary’s Center for Life Long Learning.

forgiveness. Luther often cited Isa 64:6: “All our righteous deeds are filthy rags,” as a way of helping us remember that the Lord alone is building his kingdom his way and not our way.

Therefore not the purpose-driven life, but the forgiveness-given life.⁴

⁴ Todd Wilken, “Purpose-Driven or Forgiveness-Given?” (available at www.crossalone.us)