

**Augustana College
Chapel of Reconciliation**

Vocare

Mike Wanous

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Today I want to share with you my excitement about what I have been learning about the Lutheran concept of vocation. The word vocation comes from the Latin word vocare, to call. Martin Luther introduced this idea that we have all been gifted by God with strengths and talents and we are called by Him to use these gifts to serve others. Frederick Buechner described vocation as the place where “our deep gladness meets the world’s deep need”. This idea might not seem revolutionary but in the sixteenth century this was counter-cultural because people believed that vocation or spiritual calling was exclusively reserved for priests and those joining a monastery, and thus serving God by retreating from the world. His message was that God has placed each of us in multiple “stations” in life: in family, work, and public life. If you are a mother taking care of your children, or a farmer, or a carpenter, and you are faithful to the calling to serve others that God has given you, then He is just as pleased with you as if you were a bishop or a monk following their calling. Luther’s crystal clear understanding of calling derived from a discovery he made from studying the book of Romans in the New Testament. He came to the remarkable conclusion that our standing with God is determined by faith in Christ’s work on the cross, and not by our own good works. As the scriptures say: “for by grace you have been saved through faith”. This realization that God offered forgiveness through faith absolutely revolutionized Luther’s life, *and* the history of the Church. Luther’s concept of vocation envisioned that we are freed by faith, to live lives of service to others.

I love Hans Schwarz's description of Luther's idea of "station": "A station is a place in society in which one finds oneself, depending on one's age, marital status, occupation, and so forth". Where one finds oneself...regardless of the twists and turns of life. In other words, wherever we find ourselves in life, God has put us there to fulfill a special calling to serve. Luther said: "Every person surely has a calling. While attending to it he serves God. A king serves God when he is at pains to look after and govern his people. So do the mother of a household when she tends her baby, the father of a household when he gains a livelihood by working, and a pupil when he applies himself diligently to his studies...Therefore it is a great wisdom when a human being does what God commands and earnestly devotes himself to his vocation without taking into consideration what others are doing. But surely there are few who do this."

Can you tell I'm excited about vocation? A few of us recently attended the "Education for Vocation" conference at Augsburg College. I learned that there is a growing realization that Luther's concept of vocation is a lost treasure of the Lutheran tradition that must be rediscovered and hold a prominent place in Lutheran higher education. In fact, Bishop Mark Hanson told us that he sees vocation as the defining focus of Lutheran colleges. The concept of vocation, of God's calling, has the potential to infuse our students, alumni, and congregations with a renewed sense of meaning and purpose for their lives.

In his book, *The Centered Life*, Jack Fortin describes vocation this way: "God created me with a unique set of gifts and potentials, as unique as my fingerprints. God gave me these gifts so that I can live a good life for myself and for others. When I have a realistic view of these gifts of God, neither denying them nor exaggerating them, I can operate out of a personal center, out of who I am, who I was meant to be....With God as our center we live in unconditional love. Freed from the need to earn our salvation or justify our existence on earth, we ask, "Now what? Now what is my life for?" The Christian answer is: God's grace frees you to

love and serve your neighbor. You are free to become a ‘little Christ’ to the people in your life, your community, God’s world”.

Fortin outlined six ways of discerning our calling. **First, Recognize your gifts.** Scripture teaches that we are all gifted by God. Think of Paul’s description of the church as a body with many parts in I Corinthians 12. Each part has a specific function that serves the common good. **Second, Look at your context.** “Luther taught people that to discover their callings they need to look at their circumstances, the context of their life.” Consider the stations where you find yourself and open your eyes to the needs around you. **Third, Prayer.** Ask God, how have you gifted me? And how do you want me to serve those around me? **Fourth, Listen to your life.** Listen to those inner stirrings, reflect on your life experiences. Remember, vocare means “to call”. Listen for the call. **Fifth, Listen to your community.** Those who know you well may recognize gifts that you have not seen and can confirm those you have seen. Or they may help us see when we are trying to serve with gifts that we do not really have. **Sixth, Recognize Joy.** “When we are operating from our gifts, we usually experience joy and energy because we are doing that for which we are made.” What we are called to do may be difficult, but it will come with a sense of joy and fulfillment.

A modern-day conception of vocation can be seen in David Brooks’ idea of the “Summoned Life” which he shared recently in an opinion piece in the New York Times. In contrasting the “Well-Planned Life” with the Summoned Life, Brooks points out that the Summoned Life “starts from an entirely different perspective. Life isn’t a project to be completed; it is an unknowable landscape to be explored. A 24-year-old can’t sit down and define the purpose of life in the manner of a school exercise because she is not yet deep enough into the landscape to know herself or her purpose. That young person — or any person — can’t see into the future to know what wars, loves, diseases and chances may loom. She may know concepts, like parenthood or old age, but she doesn’t really understand their meanings until she is engaged in them....The person

leading the Summoned Life emphasizes the context, and asks, “What are my circumstances asking me to do?”...and...starts with a very concrete situation: I’m living in a specific year in a specific place facing specific problems and needs. At this moment in my life, I am confronted with specific job opportunities and specific options. The important questions are: What are these circumstances summoning me to do? What is needed in this place? What is the most useful social role before me?”

What is your vocation? How are you summoned to respond and serve in the world around you? I will conclude with an admonition from Martin Luther: “to whatever station you belong –whether you are a husband, an officer of the state, or a teacher of the church—look about you, and see whether you have done full justice to your calling”.

References

1. Hans Schwarz. 1996. Martin Luther’s understanding of vocation in the light of today’s problems. *Lutheran Theological Journal* 30(1): 4-12.
2. Frederick Buechner. 1973. *Wishful Thinking: A Theological ABC*. New York, Harper & Row. P. 95.
3. Jack Fortin. 2006. *The Centered Life: Awakened, Called, Set Free, Nurtured*. Minneapolis, Augsburg Fortress.
4. David Brooks. 2010. *The Summoned Self*. New York Times editorial, page A23, August 3, 2010.
<http://www.nytimes.com/2010/08/03/opinion/03brooks.html>

MORNING WORSHIP
Monday, May 2, 2011

Prelude Partita on “*With High Delight*” Michael Wolniakowski

Welcome/announcements

Invocation

Litany the congregation’s response is “**Raise us, Good Lord**”

Prayer

Hymn “*Be Thou My Vision*” ELW #793

Scripture Luke 5:1-11

Sermon Mike Wanous, Assoc. Academic Dean

Hymn “*Take My Life that I May Be*” ELW #583

Prayers

Benediction

Postlude “*Hornpipe*” Robin Dinda
Matt Cook, Organ

CAMPUS MINISTRY ANNOUNCEMENTS

SOUTH DAKOTA SYNOD ASSEMBLY, June 10-11, 2011, Sioux Falls. We need two delegates from the student congregation, a man and a woman, to represent us at the synod assembly. All expenses are paid...a great opportunity to see and hear the church active around and beyond congregations! See Pr. Paul or Carol if you are interested. Preference will be given to students from the S Dak. Synod, ELCA.

CAMP COUNSELOR COMMISSIONING SERVICE - There will be a commissioning service to bless summer camp counselors on **Monday, May 9th**. If you and someone you know is planning to work at a camp, please let Carol in the chapel office know.

CHAPEL SCHEDULE

Monday (2 nd)	Morning Worship, 10 am - Mike Wanous, Acad. Aff.
Tuesday (3 rd)	Roman Catholic Mass, 10 am
Wednesday (4 th)	Holy Communion, 10 am - Margot Nelson; Covenant Award Presentation; Mark Braun, Sp. Music
Friday (6 th)	Morning Worship, 10 am - Laura Ayres/Chris Haak, Sr. Spkrs.
Sunday (8 th)	Morning Worship, 11 am - Kayla Rockwell, '11; Pr. Becca Freeman, Pres.
Monday (9 th)	Camp Counselor Commissioning Service, 10 am