



Good Shepherd Lutheran Church & School

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A Stephen Ministry Congregation

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Sixth Sunday of Easter

May 21, 2017

“Always Called But Not Always Employed”

(Genesis 2:1-3)

Rev. David K. Groth

“Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all the host of them. And on the seventh day God finished his work that he had done, and he rested on the seventh day from all his work that he had done. So God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it God rested from all his work that he had done in creation” (Genesis 2:1-3).

**Every day, everywhere, by everyone...
sharing the grace of the Good Shepherd.**

Collect: O God, the giver of all that is good, by Your holy inspiration grant that we may think those things that are right and by Your merciful guiding accomplish them; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. **Amen.**

Rest. From the very beginning, the necessity of rest is there in the biblical tradition. In the creation account, for six days God is busy creating light, flinging stars into space, fashioning the moon, knitting together plants, animals, creeping and crawling things, flying creatures, a man and a woman. And then, “On the seventh day, God rested from all the work he had done” (Gen. 2:2).

The seventh day of rest is not an empty day. No it’s a day full of rest, a necessary part of the work of creation – to pause and take it all in and savor what has been accomplished. God rests not because he’s worn out, but because his work is complete. In taking his rest, God gives us the example we need, the permission, the nudge, and ultimately, the command to rest. We need rest. Your work will never be done, that is, until you deliberately rest from it. Otherwise, it will haunt you, shadow, grind you down, and probably depress you.

And notice, even though God rests, the earth keeps spinning, and the sun keeps shining, the crops keep growing. Of course, God eventually returns to the work of caring for all that he has made, but not before taking time to pause and enjoy all that he has accomplished.

I submit that can serve as a sort of theology of retirement. It’s a time of rest, for sure, a time to disengage the wheels from the daily grind, a time to savor what you’ve accomplished by God’s grace. It’s a time to enjoy his creation. But in retirement, it’s also important to re-engage, because God continues to call us to serve, maybe in different ways than we have been, but God wants us to live out our lives in service to one another. Psalm 92, “The righteous flourish like the palm tree . . . They still bear fruit in old age; they are ever full of sap and green.” Ps. 92:12-14

In retirement, you don't have a job, but you still have your various vocations. You're still called to be a father or mother, grandfather or grandmother, citizen, volunteer, church member, and so on. In retirement, you still have these vocations; you just don't have a job.

Ron, you've been a teacher and DCE now for 48 years. That's really quite remarkable. 48 years of teaching children and adults. 48 years of planting the seed of God's Word. 48 years of classroom devotions, of chapel services, of adult Bible studies. 48 years of VBS. 48 years of chapel services.

In chapel, Ron will often talk about how much he loves DeeDee and his children, his grandchildren. I think that's really cool. What a great role model for all those little boys, who, God-willing, will become husbands and fathers and grandfathers. And Ron has a way of talking to the kids, a casual comfort that only comes after 48 years of teaching them. And when that banter is mated with a great big faith, and with the living Word of God, a little bit of magic happens. In chapel, Ron will always, always point to Jesus as our Savior. That's the central message. And in chapel, he will frequently talk about heaven, and when he talks about heaven, he smiles (he can't help himself) and when Ron smiles, you can't see his eyes anymore. He's all eyebrows. For all this, and much more, we owe you a debt of gratitude.

Remember, God in his wisdom demands that we respect our elders. Leviticus 19:32, "Rise in the presence of the aged and show respect for the elderly." The principle here is that a new generation owes a measure of thanks to every member of the previous generation. Our elders planted fields and fought in wars. They built churches and hospitals and schools and infrastructure. They advanced the arts and sciences. Generally, they made sacrifices on our behalf. So by their efforts, however humble or heroic, the elderly have earned a measure of our gratitude and respect. God used them on our behalf. So God himself tells us one way we revere Him is by showing honor and respect to our elders.

It's proper then to pause and thank you Ron. Children who have spent any time in your classroom come out knowing something of Jesus as their Savior. But they also come out knowing how to parse a sentence, and a little of how the world works, and how to determine the value of x and y .

In fact, Grant Hunter, a former student recalled Ron preparing them for advanced math classes in high school. And he told them "if ever you get into trouble with your math grades, if you feel like you're a little behind the other kids, and if ever the teacher asks you 'What grade school did you go to?' you hold your chin up high and tell them: 'St. John's Lutheran School!'"

48 years of all that – the planting, the teaching and tutoring and teasing, 48 years of volunteering to shovel and salt and vacuum and set up and tear down. 48 years of all that, and more, and now you get to rest and savor life and God's creation a little more, and take satisfaction in your accomplishments, and spend more time with your family.

But as you know retirement is not just one long holiday. The biblical view is that this is also a time of promise and potential and productivity. (I'm talking to us all now.) "The righteous . . . still bear fruit in old age." The biblical view is this is time to take all those experiences you've accumulated, all that training, and put it to good use in service of your neighbor and in praise of God. Turn your passions into purposeful living.

It's not just the biblical view. Social scientists are saying if we want to stay physically and mentally healthy and happy, we should think of retirement not as a long vacation, but more as a career change. In fact, a Wall Street Journal article said research is showing that "too much focus on feeling happy in retirement can actually lead to feeling less happy." Whereas those living "with a sense of purpose as they age are more likely to remain cognitively intact, have better mental health and even live longer than people who focus on achieving feelings of happiness" (WSJ, 3/15/11).

In retirement, you still have your various vocations.

You just don't have a job. You're still called to be a father or mother, grandfather or grandmother, citizen, volunteer, church member, and so on. You're just not being paid for all that.

One example, children have lots of needs growing up and are dependent on others for those needs. To meet them, God in his wisdom ordained that each child should have optimally six adults to provide care and backup, those being two parents and four grandparents. In ancient times that number of six was often whittled down. Fathers went off to war, and were killed or captured and sold as slaves. Mothers died in child birth. So the involvement of the grandparents was critical to the welfare of the children.

Today it's not usually because of warfare and slavery that families are broken but because of the unraveling of the family. In the 2010 census, for the first time in history, the majority of babies born in this country are born to women out of wedlock. The American family is coming apart, and we kid ourselves if we shrug and say, "Well, children are resilient." Retirees, maybe you don't have a job anymore, but the Lord is still calling you, calling you, for example, to fill the gap and offer your grandchildren some semblance of security and acceptance and love and Christian education. As such you become a living demonstration of the love and acceptance of God in Jesus Christ. Older adults may need younger people, for sure, but when the final tally is in, not nearly as much as young people need their elders.

That's why I'm so glad Ron has agreed to continue using his gifts teaching the Sunday morning Bible Study and the Men's Breakfast Bible Study. Recently, after another excellent chapel service, I complimented Ron and added, "I don't want our kids to lose that. Would you consider coming once a month or so during the school year to lead chapel?" And Ron said, "I'd be honored." And with that, we are blessed. Conversely, what a loss to us and our children if the answer had been, "I've put in my time. Let the younger folks do it now."

Remember how God called Abraham to be the father

of a great nation? How old was Abraham? How old was Sarah? So far past prime that the promise of God was laughable. But isn't that interesting? The Lord can choose from any number of talented, well-educated, young, strong, energetic people. There's a message behind the fact that God repeatedly chooses to do wonderful things through old people.

"I know the plans I have for you" says the Lord in Jeremiah 29, "plans to prosper you not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future." He has plans for your whole life, not just two-thirds or three-quarters. "For we are his workmanship" Paul wrote, "created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them" (Eph. 2:10).

On the seventh day, God rested from all his work that he had done, giving us an example and the encouragement we need. It's okay for Christians to disengage the wheels and trust in God. Even when we rest, the earth still turns on its axis. Even when you rest, Ron, those seeds you planted decades ago are still viable, waiting for their opportunity. In the parable, Jesus said whether the farmer is sleeping or doing other chores, "All by itself the seed sprouts and grows, though he knows not how" (Mk 4:28). Similarly, Martin Luther said, "While I drink my little glass of Wittenberg beer, the Gospel runs its course." That is, he didn't have to go on incessantly teaching and preaching. He could go home and kick up his feet and have a beer, trusting God's Word is living and active, working on the hearts and minds of people.

When Luther was near his end he wrote, "I am an exhausted old man, tired out from so many labors. I have worked myself to death. For one person, I have done enough. I'll go lie down . . . and sleep now. It is over for me . . . (but then he added) "except for taking an occasional whack at the pope." We may not have a job, but we always have our vocations.

One last thing. Those who take God seriously take rest seriously . . . Sabbath rest, the rest in retirement, giving our bodies and minds the rest they require, but also trusting

in God for eternal rest. For Christ has died for us all, young and old. He has made us his children through baptism, and all of us, regardless of our age, make up the Body of Christ. No parts are superfluous in God's eyes; each has value and purpose. Moreover, Christ's life and death give meaning and mission to all our days. And he has redeemed the whole life too, not just three quarters of it. And he has unique blessings in store for every chapter of our lives.

And of course, the greatest of these gifts comes at the very end, when we close our eyes one last time, and on the other side, Jesus wakes us up and welcomes us home. Thanks be to God. Amen.

