

Almighty God, heavenly Father, without whose aid and blessing all our labors are in vain, we humbly ask You, regard Your goodness and our need, and bless us, that in Your name and with firm trust in You we may patiently and cheerfully labor in our callings, honor Your Word, and evermore praise You; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, ever one God, now and forever. Amen. (The Lutheran Liturgy, companion altar book for The Lutheran Hymnal, p. 145)

After this Absalom got himself a chariot and horses, and fifty men to run before him. And Absalom used to rise early and stand beside the way of the gate. And when any man had a dispute to come before the king for judgment, Absalom would call to him and say, "From what city are you?" And when he said, "Your servant is of such and such a tribe in Israel," Absalom would say to him, "See, your claims are good and right, but there is no man designated by the king to hear you." Then Absalom would say, "Oh that I were judge in the land! Then every man with a dispute or cause might come to me, and I would give him justice." And whenever a man came near to pay homage to him, he would put out his hand and take hold of him and kiss him. Thus Absalom did to all of Israel who came to the king for judgment. So Absalom stole the hearts of the men of Israel. And at the end of four years Absalom said to the king, "Please let me go and pay my vow, which I have vowed to the LORD, in Hebron. For your servant vowed a vow while I lived at Geshur in Aram, saying, 'If the LORD will indeed bring me back to Jerusalem, then I will offer worship to the LORD.'" The king said to him, "Go in peace." So he arose and went to Hebron. But Absalom sent secret messengers throughout all the tribes of Israel, saying, "As soon as you hear the sound of the trumpet, then say, 'Absalom is king at Hebron!'" With Absalom went two hundred men from Jerusalem who were invited guests, and they went in their innocence and knew nothing. And while Absalom was offering the sacrifices, he sent for Ahithophel the Gilonite, David's counselor, from his city Giloh. And the conspiracy grew strong, and the people with Absalom kept increasing. And a messenger came to David, saying, "The hearts of the men of Israel have gone after Absalom." Then David said to all his servants who were with him at Jerusalem, "Arise, and let us flee, or else there will be no escape for us from Absalom. Go quickly, lest he overtake us quickly and bring down ruin on us and strike the city with the edge of the sword." And the king's servants said to the king, "Behold, your servants are ready to do whatever my lord the king decides."

In Christ Jesus, who calls believers from and into all sorts of vocations in life, so that He might use our various gifts and talents to serve one another in His Church, dear fellow redeemed:

The Apostle Paul writing to the Christians in Rome points this out to them: "as in one body we have many members, and the members do not all have the same function, so we, though many, are

one body in Christ, and individually members one of another. Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them." These gifts usually correspond to our various vocations in this life. We see in our Gospel lesson that our Lord called some of His disciples who were fulfilling their vocation as fishermen. But He changes their vocation from being fishers of fish to fishers of men.

God called David to the vocation of being King of His people. David, as we well know, was a sinner and as a consequence of his grievous sins of adultery and murder, he was going to have turmoil in his own household. Our text recounts such turmoil as David's son, Absalom, is seeking by his own schemes to assume the vocation of king. He had no right to flee his vocation as prince and steal the kingship. But this shameful desire on sinners' part, even among believers, is something actively found among us today. So consider how it is that **Our Lord Calls Sinners Like Us into His Service**. Peter in our Gospel lesson told Jesus to depart from him since he was a sinful man. But instead Jesus called him to a new vocation!

I

It is well established that David brought about these treasonous exploits of Absalom upon himself. Not that Absalom was innocent in his plots to overthrow his father, but again our Lord would use such discontent in David's household to keep him humbly repentant for the rest of his days as the King of His people.

Consider the sinister undermining of David's vocation as king by his son: "Absalom used to rise early and stand beside the way of the gate ... when any man had a dispute to come before the king for judgment, Absalom would call to him and say, ... 'See, your claims are good and right, but there is no man designated by the king to hear you. ... Oh that I were judge in the land! Then every man with a dispute or cause might come to me, and I would give him justice.'"

For four long years Absalom perpetrated this early morning ritual. He stole the hearts of the people from his father. When sensing he had secured a large enough following he pretended he was going on a religious pilgrimage, but instead was gathering to himself his own personal army to drive David out of Jerusalem. Sadly, it worked.

Our sinfulness is not a qualification, which makes us worthy of our divine vocations, of course. But it does impact how we fulfill the work we are given to do. Absalom was a sinner. He sought to change his vocation through unlawful sinister ways.

God was using David in his sinfulness by keeping him focused properly through repentance and faith. What are your vocations? Does your sinfulness intrude upon what God has called you to do? -

absolutely. For whom does it not? Consider how we are instructed in our Catechism as we make confession:

Here consider your own situation according to the Ten Commandments, whether you are a father, mother, son, daughter, employer, employee; whether you have been disobedient, dishonest, lazy; whether you have injured anyone by word or deed; whether you have stolen, neglected, wasted anything, or done any harm.

We hear about “white guilt” these days, this is as phony as it would be to feel guilty because you are black or any other race. It is easy to apologize and repent for nonexistent guilt, because it does not really hurt so badly, especially when you can imagine others or more guilty of such fake guilt. You and have true guilt in regard to our sins against God and neighbor – reviewing your vocational sins is proper.

II

It appears Absalom was impenitent in forsaking his vocation and tried to assume the vocation of his father. Have you ever done something like this? Perhaps you have disliked your supervisor, your employer, and sought to undermine or sabotage their position, so that they might lose it and you could assume it. Children will even become rebellious toward their parents attempting to strip them of their authority, so that they can do what they wish.

Naturally we do observe those in vocations, which have authority over us, in their many failures, foibles and even sin. Sadly, in our arrogance we often assume we are far superior in our abilities and because we see them in their weaknesses we seek to justify our disobedience, even worse undermine their authority. No doubt Absalom observed his father’s failures, foibles and even sin close up and personal. Just because David was a penitent believer, he was not a perfect king, father or husband. Yet God called him to his vocations intending to use him despite his sinfulness. Instead of undermining those over us or alongside us with whom we work, we should pray for them, even asking that we might help them overcome their many weaknesses making them successful in every way.

After David was informed that Absalom’s conspiracy was gaining ground and that he would possibly soon be trapped and defeated in Jerusalem, he gave the order to flee. The king’s servants said to him, “Behold, your servants are ready to do whatever my lord the king decides.” These servants too, would have opportunity to see David in his many sinful weaknesses, but they were committed to their vocations as his servants and instead of joining the ungodly rebellion they expressed their full support in accordance with God’s will.

These servants had no idea David would ultimately prevail, but they did not forsake him in his hour of need. They might have been on the "*wrong side of history*" as it is commonly threatened today. But this did not justify them forsaking their God-given vocations. By their faithful service, the service of his commanders and soldiers, and many others, David would be restored to his palace and throne.

We have heard much of anarchists today in our own country, their rebellious rioting, looting, toppling and killing are as wrong as Absalom's rebellion was in his day. But while it is easy for us to condemn all such immoral behavior, we need to look at our own lives and consider how we in our vocations have either supported those above and alongside us or wrongly tried to undermine them.

You and I can review our lives and the many vocations our Lord has placed us and we have reason to hang our heads in shame. These vocations can reach back into our childhood and even in our present day experiences. But who always fulfilled perfectly every vocation He was placed in this life? - Christ Jesus, our Substitute. He fulfilled all such vocational righteousness for you. And on top of that He paid the price for your many vocational sins so that you should know and believe that all your sins are forgiven. David could not end his son's rebellion and had to rely on the spear of his commander. Yet God ended your rebellion in the death of His Son for you. He lovingly did not spare His own Son but gave Him up for us all.

God calls us at times to change our vocations to be sure, but never to the harm of our neighbors. When the disciples were called anew, they left their nets and followed Jesus. Serve the Lord in gladness in whatever vocations He has called you, to His glory and the welfare of your neighbors, trusting that for Jesus' sake your work despite your many vocational sins is always pleasing to Him in Christ. Amen.