



Church Worker Appreciation Sunday

A Resource from *Set Apart to Serve*

Twentieth Sunday after Pentecost
(Proper 25)

Goal: To give thanks to God and pray for our LCMS church workers who teach the Gospel from one generation to the next.

Readings: Genesis 4:1–15; 2 Timothy 4:6–8, 16–18;
Luke 18:9–17

Sermon text: 2 Timothy 4:6–18

Suggested Hymns: *LSB* 646, 745, 614, 895
Title: *Through Me*

Outline:

- I. Through me — Adam
- II. Through me — Christ
- III. Through me — Church worker

The Sermon

Through me ... That's what St. Paul said: "So that, *through me* the message might be fully proclaimed, and all the Gentiles might hear it." What is "this message" that St. Paul proclaims with such conviction? Why would St. Paul exchange his life of luxury and power to suffer, even give up his life, for this message? Why is it so important to St. Paul to have all the world — both Jew and Gentile — hear this message? And why does God use such a "chief of sinners" like Paul to proclaim this divine, holy, priceless, eternal message?

Through me ... That's what fallen Adam must say.

When we look at Adam's son, Cain, we see that the apple doesn't fall far from the tree. When Eve gave birth to Cain, she believed that he *just might be* the

Savior of the world God had spoken of at the Fall. Instead, Cain proved himself to be the son of fallen Adam. Cain was selfish in failing to give God his first fruits. He was jealous and angry because God accepted Abel's offering, but not his. He was a hater and a murderer and took his own brother's life. Adam's fall into sin had come to this; jealousy, hate and murder.

Through Adam, his son, Cain, was cursed. The stain of Cain's sin and curse could not be removed — it soaked into the ground; it soaked into his soul; it soaked into history through the ages. God said to Cain, "And now you are cursed When you work the ground, it shall no longer yield to you its strength. You shall be a fugitive and wanderer on the earth." Cain was convicted, "My punishment is greater than I can bear." He feared that another man might kill him, but his greater fear was that He was cursed and dead in his sin. *Through Adam*, sin is crouching at *our* door. It is not only Cain who is cursed in Adam's sin, but we are as well — you and me. The desire to hate and harm our brother is great; we fail to love and honor our spouse; we sniff out every sexual sin; we dishonor our parents and other authorities; we are pulled to speak evil against one another in gossip and slander; we hunger for the things of this world and we put our trust in them for life and happiness.

Through Adam, we are all cursed; *through Adam* we all die. Adam, Eve, Cain, Abel, you, me, our children, and our children's children — we are all lost and condemned to eternal judgment.

Through Me ... These are the words of Jesus Christ for our life and salvation.

Jesus said about Himself, "For God so loved the world that He gave his one and only Son, that whoever

believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to *save* the world *through* Him.”

All of life ... all of creation ... the core of all existence ... is seated in God taking on our flesh and rescuing us from sin, death and the devil. He accomplished this through His sacrificial death and glorious resurrection.

Christians do not believe in *a* god. We believe in the one true God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. We are not Christians by being “good people” or being “basically good”; we are Christians through the gift of God in the shedding of His blood and the giving of His life for our salvation. We are not Christians by natural birth, but through the new birth of water and the Word in Holy Baptism.

The Christian faith is about the life and salvation God gives us in and *through* the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Jesus poured Himself out as a drink offering for our sins. Your sins are now forgiven. Jesus bore the crown of thorns, shedding His blood in payment for our disobedience. The crown of righteousness is now yours. Jesus laid down His life in death in exchange for our eternal death. Eternal life is now *yours*. Jesus rose from the dead on the third day. On the Last Day, He will call your name, and you will be raised from the dead and live with Christ forever in body and soul.

It is true that, like Cain, our punishment is greater than we can bear! But Christ took the punishment we all deserve upon Himself. We each now bear the mark of Christ, both upon our foreheads and upon our hearts, as one redeemed by Christ the crucified. In Holy Baptism, we are no longer the cursed sons of Adam; we are the adopted and redeemed sons of God in Christ Jesus to live with Him forever.

God inspired St. Paul to instruct us with a marvelous truth from the prophet Joel. “For everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.” Then he says, “But how will everyone call on the Lord in whom they have not believed? And how is anyone to believe in the Lord of they have never heard? And how are they to hear [about the Lord and salvation] without someone *preaching*? And how are they to preach unless they are sent?” Paul then quotes the prophet Isaiah, “How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!” And now listen to these marvelous words from

St. Paul, “So [saving] faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ”
And here’s where our church workers come in!

Just as the Apostle Paul confessed, so divinely called and ordained pastors also confess: “*through me* the message [of Christ] might be fully proclaimed that all people might hear it ... believe it ... and have saving faith.”

God established the pastoral office through Jesus’ own institution. He still mandates the pastoral office to this day. Pastors serve in the *preaching office*. Pastors are *sent*. Paul uses the Greek word *apostello*. Sounds like *apostle*, doesn’t it? This *apostello*, or “sending” happens when God *calls* pastors into the pastoral ministry and calls them from one congregation to the next. The *preaching* Paul is talking about is the preaching of the Word of God, centered on proclaiming Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of sins and eternal life. Through the preached Word of God’s called and ordained pastors, the Holy Spirit works saving faith in the life and soul of His people ... in *your* life.

The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod has established other *important* vocations in the church. Pastors are “Ordained Ministers.” We call all the other church work vocations “Commissioned Ministers.” These include: the Lutheran school teacher, director of Christian education (DCE), director of Christian outreach (DCO), director of family life ministry (DFLM), director of parish music (DPLM), director of church ministries (DCM), and deaconess. We say these important, sacred and joyful commissioned vocations are “established in love by the Church to support the Office of the Holy Ministry” (*LSB Agenda*, 222).

We appreciate and give thanks for all God’s people in their many and various vocations — husbands, wives, parents, children, workers, employers, youth, widows, everyone! Luther names these in his table of duties in the *Small Catechism*.

But today, we recognize and give thanks to God for those who serve Him and His people in full-time vocations, specifically pastors and commissioned workers. Pastors preach and teach the eternal Word of God for the life and salvation of God’s people. The pastor represents Christ to God’s people, caring for their souls with the Word of God, with the Body and Blood of Christ, in instruction and Holy Baptism.

Pastors speak God's Word into all circumstances of life, especially at the time of death, preparing God's people for eternal life.

The Lutheran school teacher teaches God's Word to our children in the classroom that they may know Jesus Christ, the forgiveness of sins, and life in heaven forever. The DCE instructs God's people with the true Word of God and often influences the faith life of our youth and teens. The Deaconess applies God's Word with acts of mercy to women and children, the aged and infirm, and many more. The Director of Parish Music teaches the Word of God and helps form the faith in young and old through sacred music and the liturgy. The Director of Christian Outreach helps the people of God give witness of the faith through the Word of God. The Director of Church Ministries helps administrate the congregation decently and in good order under the Word of God.

We pray for our church workers, and we give thanks for their work among us. In order to destroy the faith of God's people, Satan targets those who preach and teach God's Word. No work on earth is easy due to the Fall, but the church worker often fights a deep spiritual battle against Satan, sinful sheep, and his or her own sinful flesh. Yet, daily, our church workers fight the good fight — they fight the beautiful, outstanding, distinguished battle of being faithful servants of the Word. They run the race daily, despite little prestige, often low wages, church politics, and work that is seldom measured or completed. Like St. Paul, they often stand alone, with very few standing by them when they teach the faith and strive to make it a priority in the lives of the congregation.

But the work of our church workers is honorable. It is sacred. It is joyful. Our church workers serve the God of salvation and proclaim a Gospel that is the one thing needful for our life and salvation. Our church workers are grounded in Jesus Christ. And God has promised to them and to all who believe in Christ that a crown of righteousness is laid up for them — not because of their merit, but because of the merit of Jesus Christ, whom they serve. And with all who believe in Jesus Christ, our church workers are rescued finally and safely on the Last Day by the blood of Christ. They shall see the day of our Lord's appearing, and like you, be joyously welcomed into Christ's heavenly kingdom.

This month we celebrate Martin Luther and the Reformation, which began when Luther nailed the 95 Theses on the Wittenberg Castle Church door. Luther re-focused the church on Word alone, grace alone, faith alone, Christ alone. Our church workers teach these eternal truths.

Through me ... St. Paul said, "*Through me* the Gospel might be fully proclaimed." We say this also of our church workers — *through them* the Word of God is taught to us in whom the Holy Spirit works saving faith. Today, we give thanks to God and pray for our church workers who teach the Gospel from one generation to the next. And all this — life and salvation, the one thing needful for the forgiveness of our sins and our eternal life, is Jesus Christ who says, "*through Me* you have eternal life." Amen.