

Vocations are a tricky thing. And it's quite popular in our culture today to talk about the subject. Though most people don't have a clue that they're doing it. They think they're talking about finding the meaning of life. About finding purpose to their existence. About answering the question, "Why am I here?"

And they spend their entire lives trying to answer this riddle. Seeking out whatever it is that they find valuable. Money or knowledge or art, music, culture, family, philanthropy. Even religion. Sometimes, even Christianity itself. They try to answer it themselves. They try to find their own meaning. Their own purpose.

And most of the time, they end up running around in circles. Because they think they're trying to find meaning and purpose and a reason for existence. But what they're actually seeking is a calling. A vocation. And the very nature of a calling is that it comes from outside of us. You cannot call yourself. If it is truly a vocation, then it is, by definition, something that is given to you by someone else. Even though it may very often look like something you found on your own.

That's especially true in the vocation called marriage. Because being a husband or wife is a calling. But, at first glance, that doesn't make a lot of sense. I didn't propose to my wife because a light came from heaven and I heard a voice say, "Go marry that woman." I proposed to her because I loved her. And because I couldn't imagine life without her. And if I wasn't ever going to leave her, then why not tell her that? Why not tell everyone that?

Finding and marrying Stefani were fundamentally my decisions to make. So what part of being a husband is a calling? Well, simply put, the marriage part is. You see, committing to love, honor, and cherish a person for as long as you both shall live is nothing more than a contract. You can write that up on a piece of paper, sign the bottom, have a notary stamp it and call yourselves whatever you want.

The world calls that contract a marriage, but Christians don't. Christian marriage is more than a legal contract. Christian marriage is a calling. It's an act of God done in the Church, by the Church, for the Church. In which the personal commitment and contractual agreement of the two people is not nearly as important as God looking down from heaven and saying through His chosen under-shepherd, "I now pronounce you husband and wife." That pronouncement is not a decision of the pastor. That is not a choice of the bride and groom. That is a calling from God.

And that is exactly how we should treat marriage. That is the attitude we should take toward it. The world says, "I am your husband or wife because I choose to be." The Christian says, "I am your husband or wife because God says I am." Your personal opinion on the matter is, frankly, irrelevant. You didn't call yourself to be a husband or wife. God did. Which means everything you do in marriage is about fulfilling that calling that he has given you.

And understanding marriage as a calling is really important to understanding our Epistle lesson for today. This message, like it's similar counterpart in Colossians, is considered a landmine in today's culture. Pastors hesitate to preach on it. Christians avoid discussing it. And when a non-Christian throws it in your face, many Christians will cringe and do their best to sidestep the entire argument. In today's feminist, gender-fluid, woke culture, it is a taboo passage. You just don't talk about it.

Why? Well, because it's considered demeaning to women. Insulting. Sexist. How dare you tell a woman that she should submit to her husband? As if she's incapable of making her own decisions. As if her opinion is less important or less valuable. As if she were property to be controlled. That's the worldly way of thinking about marital submission. And, yes, when you define it in those terms, it sure does sound absolutely horrible.

But marriage isn't about what you're able to do. It's about what you're called to do. In fact, that's really the core of Christian discipleship in general. Being a disciple of Jesus Christ is about setting aside what you're able to do and doing what you're called to do.

As fallen human beings, we are always able to sin. Adam and Eve were able to eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Cain was able to kill his brother. The children of Israel were able to make a golden calf. But as the children of God they were all called to obey God's Law.

We are the children of God. We are called to obey God's Law. Which means that sometimes we don't do the things we are able to do. The world around us says, "Why don't you do this? It's easy." Why don't you hoard your money and possessions? Why don't you carry hate and bitterness in your heart? Why don't you pursue lust and pleasure? It's easy.

Well, of course, it's easy! Sin is always easy. And when it comes to men and women, it's easy to just toss aside everything that God says to us. It's easy to ignore God's very specific callings for men and women and for husbands and wives. Because that's exactly what the world has done and tells us to do.

But we're called to something different. We're called to wives who submit to their husbands with love and respect. Even when they disagree. Even when they think they know better. Even when they actually know better. Even when it would be easier to argue and protest and assert their rights.

Wives who submit, not in servitude, but in grateful fulfillment of their calling. So that when their children and their friends and their husbands see them, they can truly see a model of the Church submitting to Christ. And know what it means to do so.

And husbands? We're called to something too. We're called to love our wives as Christ loved the church. Think about that for a second. Love your wife in the same way that Christ loved us. Love your wife, ready and willing to sacrifice everything, including your very life, to help her and protect her. Love your wife as if her body were an extension of your own, and every decision you made that affected her was actually a decision that affected you. Consider her needs as your own needs. Her wellbeing as your own wellbeing.

That is the love that Christ showed us. And continues to show us. A love that wants the absolute very best for us. That wants to see us washed clean of every impurity by baptism of water with the word. A love that sees us without blemish no matter how scarred by sin that we become. A love that sees what we do as merely an extension of what He continues to do through us, as His body on earth.

Is it possible for us to live this calling perfectly? No, it never is. Just as this congregation doesn't always submit to Christ, even the best intentioned wives won't always submit to their husbands. That doesn't make them any less wives, or us any less the church. And husbands? Husbands won't always sacrifice for their wives, no matter how much they love them. We are sinners. And we turn our back on our calling sometimes too. That's what sin is.

No, there have been many men and women who have been called by God to many tasks on this earth. From the greatness of a prophet to the humility of a spouse. But all of our callings pale in comparison to the calling our Lord received. Who heard his call and fulfilled it perfectly, without sin.

From the day he was conceived, Christ had a calling. "*You will call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.*" The name Jesus literally means "the Lord saves." That was his calling: to save us. And nothing in this world would keep him from fulfilling that calling.

He was able to do so much more. He had command over wind and waves, angel and demon, sickness and death. Life could have been easy for him. But he chose the hard path. He set aside what he was able to do for what he was called to do. Even when it led to suffering and death on a cross.

He demonstrated submission to his Father. He demonstrated sacrifice for his bride. He fulfilled all righteous in a way that we cannot. So that when we fail in our callings, we can claim that righteousness as our own. So that when we are soiled by sin, we can clothe ourselves in his obedience. His submission. His sacrifice. And stand before our heavenly Father in splendor.

Husbands, love your wife as yourself. For in that sacrifice you reveal a glimpse of Christ's love for you. Wives, respect your husband. For in that submission you reveal a glimpse of the Church's submission to Christ. Make your lives a picture of God's great work of salvation and you will not simply have the joy of marital bliss, you will have the joy of knowing what your Lord has done for you. Amen.