

“God, the Pandemic, and Our Vocation,” Session #1, Westwood Lutheran, 9/15/2021, by Darrell Jodock

Preliminary comments:

1. The pandemic has affected people differently.
2. Reminder: faith is relational, a relationship of trust.
3. Theology is also relational
4. Vocation is an orientation to life that prioritizes service to the neighbor and service to the community. It is also relational!
5. Tonight and next week are two parts of the same package.

During the pandemic, part of what we have been experiencing is heightened uncertainty.

One reaction is to try to protect ourselves

Another reaction is to try to find someone to blame

Another description of our experience is exile or displacement.

One aspect of this experience is the feeling of isolation.

God’s promise is to “be with” us in the midst of our uncertainty and isolation.

Our calling is to “be with” those who feel abandoned. Note the power of personal presence.

Another aspect is the experience of loss, which yields trauma.

Our calling is to listen and help each other “name” the traumas and provide rituals to heal them.

On a larger level, we deal with societal “myths” that influence our behavior.

Part of what we have been experiencing is (a) the importance of relationships and (b) the patterns of individualism in our society. The latter reflects the “myth of personal independence,” which fails to recognize the reality of our interdependence. Our calling is to reconstruct the myth and to revision our behavior.

A consequence of the quest for personal independence is a breakdown in communities.

Note Robert Putnam on “social capital.”

Our vocation is not only to serve the neighbor but also to serve the community.

A second myth exposed by the pandemic is the “myth of domination.” Our quest for domination has reached the end of its rope. We can no longer ignore our interdependence with the earth. Our calling is to reconstruct the myth and revision our behavior.

What does this mean regarding our understanding of faith?

1. We need to retrieve a “theology of the cross” that acknowledges limits to our understanding of God, the world, and ourselves and celebrates the promise of God’s presence in the midst of uncertainty, loss, and suffering (=the opposite of a “prosperity gospel” that promises happiness and success).
2. We need to recover two other principles
 - a. A “theology of incarnation” that promises the presence of others and our presence with them.
 - b. A deepened understanding of the centrality of vocation. We need to acknowledge our own suffering, “see” the suffering of others, and then engage, while relying on the importance of our presence and the presence of the Spirit who accompanies us—and not be thwarted by our lack of answers.

A theme running through my remarks tonight has been that faith, theology, and our vocation are all relational. Next time I’ll suggest a way to rethink the concept of God in light of what we’ve said tonight.