

**The Second Sunday after the Epiphany**  
**January (13 &) 14, 2007**  
**Sermon by Rev Timothy A Leitzke**

A year ago, I mentioned, in a sermon, some things about which we might be nervous, and suggested the Giants' playoff game. When they lost to Carolina, some of you decided that it was my fault. So, this year, I stayed quiet, and the Giants lost. The moral is that there are some things that are beyond our control, though for any true fan that does not stop the hope that there is something that he or she can do to influence the outcome of the game. That balancing act of hoping to influence something beyond any control struck me early last week. The previous week the new congress was sworn in and a new Representative had chosen to be sworn in on a copy of the Koran. This created all kinds of hubbub, but lost in the story was a request from two Representatives to be sworn in on a copy of mega church founder Rick Warren's *Purpose Driven Life*. The story ran in the magazine, *The Wittenburg Door*.

"We were asked to use the most meaningful text in our life," said Rep. John T. McGruder of Colorado Springs, from his state's seventh district. "And, as far as I can see, my Pastor preaches more from Rick Warren than the Bible."

Well, I hope that if any of you are sworn in to office you have no cause to say, "Pastor Leitzke preaches more from whatever than the Bible." The article continued, though:

"This open-mindedness is truly godly," said Lincoln Bradford, pastor and noted praise-song author. "I hope eventually they'll use more personally inspiring items – worship music CDs, Ron Dicianni paintings, the 'Foot Prints in the Sand' poem. This country and the modern church were founded on a christian's right to have a personalized relationship with God – regardless of what's in the Bible."

Now, I am not, as an American, upset that these folks chose something other than a Bible for their swearing in. This is America and there's no state religion. I am, as a Christian, alarmed that Christians chose *Purpose Driven Life* over Holy Scripture. I don't know how many of you here today have read *Purpose Driven Life*, or what it's meant for you. Certainly everyone is entitled to read and interpret scripture. That's how we Lutherans got our start! I have some qualms about Purpose Driven theology, though. It focuses so much attention on me, and not on what God is calling me to do for the world. It tends to make me, not God, the center of my attention. It cuts against so much of what is taught in the Bible that it really bothers me. What can I do, though? Is this another case of the NY Giants being out of my control?

The thing about the Giants is that you can help them, even if only a little, by cheering. If you've ever been to a football game in a big stadium you know what I mean. I was at a University of Maryland game at Byrd Stadium, and the opponents were inside Maryland's ten yard line, just about to score. I, and thousands others, roared. It was deafening, rattling, exhilarating, and one of the opposing linemen jumped. When you're on the offense, once you've set before the play you're not allowed to move until the ball moves. In the huddle you all agreed on the signal that it was time to go, but when it's as loud as it was in Byrd Stadium it is hard to hear the quarterback. You think he said 'go', but it turns out he didn't.

You're slapped with a five yard penalty. I helped Maryland hold their opponents to a field goal.

I was only one of many, but I did my job and it had an effect on the game. The Church sometimes works in much the same way. Let me move from football and bestselling books to the textile industry to illustrate this one. The stole I'm wearing today was custom made by a man and woman from my intern congregation in Rhode Island. They joined the congregation about three years before I started there. All that they owned was a custom embroidery business. What they gave for the church was their time and their work. Confirmation Guides had their own official embroidered blue shirts. The pastor and the vicar got embroidered black polo shirts. When the altar guild sought new white paraments they gave the designs to this couple, who made the pulpit and lectern hangings, the frontal for the altar, and a stole and chasuble so the pastor would match. They gave every vicar a stole on his or her last Sunday, and this was mine. These two people worked, in their workplace, with service to God as their focus. They had no training in theology or pastoral care other than their membership in the congregation, yet they had been gifted with the Holy Spirit and they saw their vocation as a calling, God's choice for them to serve God and others.

We Lutherans call this the Priesthood of All Believers. It's the idea that all of us communicate with God, all of us are called by God, and that all of us serve God. It's easy to look at a pastor and say, "She's answered God's call." The concept of the Priesthood of All Believers says that God calls each of us, and that

God's calling for you effects what you do in life. How do you serve God? How does your vocation help God bring in the Kingdom of Heaven? Many of you are in the health care profession, working to bring physical healing to people. Many are teachers, giving an education to the young. Some are stay-at-home parents, making the healthy management of God's gift of household and family their top priority. These things are God's work. They are contemporary analogies of Christ's ministry to others.

What about vocations that don't match up so clearly? What if you're an innkeeper? What if you work retail? What if you're retired? How can these things be God's work? Maybe you truly possess the gift of hospitality, of welcoming travelers and giving them a place to stay. You're serving God by giving people a roof over their heads. Maybe you help people find the right dress or shirt, or the right computer, or the right car, or the right house. That's God's work. Do it honestly, do it for others, and you're bringing in the Kingdom of God. Maybe, now, you have time. You have gifts you never got a chance to use because you had children or you worked so hard, and you had those callings to which to attend. Or maybe you have gifts you can now use as you please, now that you're freed from the rat race. You can embrace these gifts and the new opportunity you have to use them. Don't be discouraged by having to slow down. It comes with being alive, and your work, even scaled back, is bringing in the kingdom. It is one more voice in the crowd. It is one more person doing God's work for others rather than focusing on themselves.

Friends of Christ, our vocations vary; our first vocation is as Christians. We are priests, each of us, capable of talking with our God, called and sent to do God's service in the world. Our membership in the Priesthood of All Believers shapes us and how we live. It means that what we do, in our homes and in our workplaces, is part of our faith lives. There are different gifts, but they are all from the same Spirit. There are different ministries, and yet the same Lord. There are different workings, but the same God working all of them in all of us. Amen