



# WHAT MATTERS?

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## ***What Matters? ~ Week Three*** ***Called by God: Lives that matter***

*For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God.*

*For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, Abba! Father!" The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him. (Romans 8:14-17)*

**Day One:** The Father's Business, Making all things matter again

*[He is making] known to us the mystery of his will, according to his purpose which he set forth in Christ, as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth (Ephesians 1:9-10).*

Maybe some of you remember the bumper stickers popular a few years ago: "Save the Planet." The well intended slogan attempted to awaken us to a world suffering ecologically as well as socially and to enlist us in a global effort to do something about it. Our Lord has "Save the Planet" on His mind as well. In fact St. Paul tells us in our Bible verse today that He's committed to a plan that in the end will "*unite all things in [Jesus].*" What St. Paul means by the word "unite" is to pull all creation back together in the perfect alignment and working order that God first made it to be. He pictures a finely conditioned and coordinated body working in perfect harmony with its head, Jesus Christ, and through its head with each member.

Everywhere we look we are able to see vestiges of God's original and perfect creation. At the same time we see the effects of sin. Things are broken. We see this brokenness in ourselves. We don't have to look very far to see it in the rest of the world. Paul calls it "*the bondage to decay*" and it's present in every nook and cranny of creation. God's plan is to restore everything and everyone to the perfect place and purpose for which He designed them to be in the beginning. As we considered in previous devotions, God is in the restoration business, fulltime. His *business goal* is to restore all things, to make all things new again. His *business plan* is to enlist all whom He has already restored to Himself to work with Him in restoring the rest. Elsewhere, St. Paul tells us, "*If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation . . . All this is from God who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation*" (2 Corinthians 5:17-18). God, in His great love, made the business of restoring creation His business. In His love, He has made it our business too. "Saving the Planet" is a "*Family Business.*"

God's goal will be accomplished. All of creation will be restored to Him, every aspect of it made new. It began with our Lord and brother Jesus Himself as He was restored to life on Easter morning. He is called the "First Born" of the new creation. From that morning right up until this day, God's restoration plan has been carefully and patiently unfolding. Each of us, in time, has been brought into His business as each of us was born into His Family through Jesus. And so it will proceed until all things are united in Him.

**Prayer:** Lord Jesus, You gave us birth in baptism. Help us work in the family business restoring people to You one by one. Amen.

## ***Week Three ~ Called by God: Lives that matter***

*The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs--heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him.*

*(Romans 8:16-17)*

### **Day Two: Restoration, A Family Business**

On a recent plane trip I was seated next to a woman returning home from buying inventory for her family owned tile and granite business. She and her husband owned the business and operated it along with their two sons, and their wives. She talked at some length about the challenges and risks of owning a family business. But she concluded her remarks on a note of pure joy: "This business is something my husband and I hoped to pass on to our sons and their families. We loved starting this business from scratch, seeing it grow, and serving many people. We hope that our sons will be able to love and enjoy it as much as we do."

What a different spirit she had from many who grumble about their 8-5, forty hour a week jobs. They express very little joy, very little future, and very little commitment. In contrast, the woman on the plane spoke with appreciation and some sense of accomplishment of the long hours required to build their business and the bright future she hoped it would continue to bring her family. While not all family businesses are so fortunate, this one reflects what a family business can be when all have a real love for each other and each has a true sense of ownership and commitment to what the business is about.

We do well to understand our work in this world from the vantage point of the family business. I might add that we think of this idea of "Family Business" not as metaphor but as reality. God's Kingdom is family owned and operated if we take seriously what St. Paul writes to us, *The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ.* Paul calls us "children of God" and "heirs of God." Heirs eventually inherit the family business from their parents. Until that time they work for mom and dad like other employees. But with this one significant difference, they personally belong to the family that owns the business.

Family businesses work well when all have a real love for each other and each has a true sense of ownership and commitment to what the business is about. Nothing could be more true regarding the Father's Business. *God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son.* Here we see what love,

ownership, and investment is finally all about. God invested everything He is and has in order to restore creation. Out of love our Father started, expands, and keeps the Family Business alive and strong. He did and does it all. He also loves having us co-own it with Him. What joy is ours when we follow His heart and choose to invest in the Family Business even as He has. Perhaps that's what He meant when He called us to seek first the Kingdom and its righteousness.

## ***Week Three ~ Called by God: Lives that matter***

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*(Romans 8:16-17)*

**Day Three:** Called from→Called to

*But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellences of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. Once you were not a people, now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy (1 Peter 2:9-10).*

Christians in the New Testament were a lot like us. They felt pretty small and insignificant in a world governed by the politics, economics, and morality of people who did not know God and did not care to. St. Peter wrote them a letter in order to encourage them by helping them see their part in the big picture, that is, the picture as God sees it—a picture and plan for this world's healing far greater and wonderful than anything human beings could either design or make happen. Central to St. Peter's message was a *call to action*.

In order for St. Peter to call the Christians of his day to action he needed to root them in their history. Who they were and why they were here. For that he returned to Mt. Sinai, where God first called His people to join Him in caring for this world. Picture the children of Israel standing before Him at the foot of Mt. Sinai. Just weeks earlier, they languished under the chains and cruel whips of Egyptian masters—broken, divided, without hope. In those few weeks, they witnessed God personally rescue them from the bondage and death of Egypt. They watched Him drown their Egyptian enemies in the Red Sea as they walked safely across it on dry ground. They received supernatural food and drink as God personally attended to their daily needs. God Himself had rescued them and given them back their lives.

Now they stood before the Lord at Mt. Sinai. Men and women who had only known slavery were suddenly and completely free. But freedom *from* slavery and death was only the first installment of the good things He had in store for them. Here at Sinai God added the second—He gave them freedom *for* living a new life—a life in which they would be privileged to share His love for the world and work with Him in its salvation. He said to them,

*You yourselves have seen what I did to the Egyptians and how I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself. Now therefore, if you will indeed*

*obey my voice and keep my covenant you shall be my treasured possession among all peoples, for all the earth is mine; and you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation (Exodus 19:4-6).*

At Sinai, God formally made these one-time slaves His children—His treasured possession. In Egypt they had no identity. Now they were *His People*, that is, *His Family*. He went on to forge a partnership with them that focused on serving as “priests” for the nations. Priests are in the business of serving others. They connect people who are broken with a God who intends to restore them. So, at Sinai, the entire nation of Israel—every man, woman, and child—was chosen by God to serve as one of His priests, to be a royal family of priests, not for service primarily to themselves, but rather, for service to the other peoples of the world.

God’s work of restoring our lives always carries two parts: Saved *from* sin, death, and the devil and saved *for* life and service in this world. Both the *from* and the *for* of our salvation center in what our Lord Jesus has done for us and now through us. Luther wrote in his Small Catechism, “[Jesus], redeemed [us] lost and condemned creatures, purchased and won [us] from all sin, from death, and from the power of the devil . . . that [we] might be His own and live under Him in His Kingdom and serve Him in everlasting righteousness, innocence, and blessedness . . .” The entire business of the “who” and “why” of our lives here on earth wraps around this one great concept: We Christians have been set free by Jesus to serve along side Him as priests in this world—connecting broken people with a restoring Father. That’s the priesthood of all believers. Like a golden thread, it weaves through all of the pages of Old and New Testaments informing and inspiring Christ’s people in every age of their divine purpose in the world.

**Prayer:** Lord God Almighty, with a mighty hand You have saved us from sin, death, and the devil. We praise You for saving us for a life of service in the world. Amen.

## ***Week Three ~ Called by God: Lives that matter***

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*(Romans 8:16-17)*

### **Day Four: Jonah's Sign**

*But no sign will be given to [you] except the sign of the prophet Jonah. For just as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth (Matthew 12:39-40).*

What is the Sign of Jonah and what does it mean for us? To answer that question we need to ask ourselves, "Why?" Why was Jonah in the belly of a big fish, or our Lord in the bosom of the earth? In a word, rebellion. Any one who knows Jonah's story will tell you, "He disobeyed God. God told him to travel to Nineveh to warn the people that if they did not repent of their evil ways they would all be destroyed. But Jonah said no. Instead of sailing to the doomed city of Nineveh, he booked passage on a ship going in the opposite direction." He refused to serve as God's priest for a people who were not part of the nation of Israel. In fact, the people of Nineveh were Israel's historic enemies. So, naturally, Jonah didn't want them to hear God's word which would lead them to repentance and new life. He did not want the Ninevites to share the restoring grace of God upon which he and Israel so desperately depended. Listen to his complaint to God when the people of Nineveh believed God's message and repented: *O Lord, is not this what I said when I was yet in my country? That is why I made haste to flee to Tarshish; for I knew that you are a gracious God and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love, and relenting from disaster.*

The Prophet Jonah became a sign for all of God's people. Almost from the day that God rescued them from Egypt they rejected the priestly purpose for which God had set them free. They were more than happy to receive God's grace and mercy, especially in time of great need (like being slaves in Egypt for four hundred years). They weren't so happy, however, to work with their Father in offering that grace and mercy to the world. They did not think that the world deserved to receive God's kindness. What they lost sight of was the fact that they did not deserve it either. Instead of remembering that they too had once been separated from God, strangers to God's promises, and without hope in this world, they had grown to expect God's grace as their due. They came to believe that God owed it to them and only to them. They

refused to be His family of priests and prophets, connecting the nations to a gracious and loving Father.

The sign of Jonah tells the story of God's desire to save the nations and to use his sinful children in the process. It's the story of God coming in love to broken people, inviting them to join Him in restoring the world, always being resisted, yet never being overcome. Generation after generation of God's people rejected their call to serve as priests for the other nations. Finally, God sent His own Son to serve as Priest and Prophet for all. It's in His Son Jesus that the sign of Jonah becomes a symbol for a new beginning. In Jesus God fulfilled His priestly plan for restoring the world. Jesus obediently took into himself the sins of the whole world and the particular rebellion of Israel His elect priests for the nations. He was willingly slain and lay dead in the belly of the earth for three days. He cried to His Father for mercy—for Himself and for all whom He carried in His Body. God heard His plea, raised Him from the dead, and declared Him to be Lord of all. In Him, God restored His sinful people to their place as His priestly people by pouring out His Spirit on them.

We Lutherans become uncomfortable when we hear that, like Israel of old, we have not been faithful partners in the Family Business. Yet, like God did with Jonah, His Spirit leads us to true repentance and trust in His death on the cross. His Spirit raises us again to be His treasured people, a holy nation, a divine priesthood for the world. You and I must continue to be in the middle of this great tension between saint and sinner; priest and parasite; resurrected and dead until the day Jesus completes the plan that His Father entrusted to him and in Him to us. This reality leads us to daily repentance and keeps us in everlasting hope.

**Prayer:** Dear Lord, we lose sight of how undeserving we are of Your love. Give us the eyes to see Your love for all people and to rejoice in the privilege of being about Your business. Amen.

## ***Week Three ~ Called by God: Lives that matter***

*The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs--heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him.*  
(Romans 8:16-17)

### **Day Five: Now in Christ**

*“Behold the days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah, not like the covenant that I made with their fathers on the day when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, my covenant which they broke . . . But this is the covenant that I will make: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be my people . . . They shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, declares the Lord. For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more” (Jeremiah 31:31-34)*

As we learned yesterday, the sign of Jonah was a sign of universal failure on the part of God’s people to carry out the purpose for which He had called them out of Egypt. Over and over again they broke the commitment that they made to God to serve the other nations as His priests, to join Him in the Family Business of connecting and restoring broken people to God and to themselves. What had gone wrong?

It seems that God’s people never really owned their part in the Family Business. It was God’s work, not theirs. True, they had promised that they would do the things that God had commanded them to do, but it was all God’s idea not theirs. And while they honored God with the lips, their hearts remained far from Him.

So God decided to begin again with them. He made a new covenant, different from the one He made on Mt. Sinai. It would have the same ultimate purpose—restoring the world—but it would operate in a very different way. This time, instead of writing His covenant on tablets of stone God would write them on people’s hearts. In other words, they would choose to work with God in the Family Business, not because He told them that they had to, but because they wanted to. It was now their heart’s desire.

That’s what God means when He said, *“I will write my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts.”* Moses was never able to create the internal motivation needed for God’s people to willingly and joyfully serve. He delivered the Law—the Business Plan—to them, but He couldn’t make

them own it. It remained external to them, written in cold, hard stone. If you obey it you will live; if you don't you will die. As such, then, it became coercive, reminiscent of their harsh and joyless lives in Egypt. It seemed like the Israelites were simply exchanging one kind of slavery for another; one kind of cruel taskmaster for another. Moses, the Lawgiver, was not able to give them the true freedom they desperately needed. They needed someone else.

That someone else was our Lord Jesus. St. Paul tells us that, "*when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons*" (Galatians 4:4-5). Jesus was sent by His Father to be our second Moses. Moses delivered God's people from the slavery of Egypt. Jesus delivers us from the slavery of legalism. Moses gave the Law of God for us to try to keep. Jesus kept the Law for us, completing what we were completely unable to do. And in so doing set us free to be God's children. God used Moses to write His Plan on stone. God used His Son to write His Plan on our own hearts, thus making it our own. The Israelites were baptized into Moses in the Red Sea. We were baptized into Jesus Himself. Paul writes that, "*For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ.*" We have His heart beating inside our chests. That means that the motivation for us to belong to God and serve in the Family Business doesn't come from God's command, but from our own desire. Like Jesus, we desire to do our Father's will.

**Prayer:** Dear Jesus, as You clothed us in baptism create the desire in us to work in the family business. Amen.

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*(Romans 8:16-17)*

### **Day Six: Co-heirs with Christ**

*For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, Abba! Father!" The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him (Romans 8:15-17).*

I saw a sign in the back window of an RV recently that read, “We’re spending our children’s inheritance.” The intended humor rests on the fact that doing such a thing is unthinkable. We work, even sacrifice, to provide an inheritance for our children. We highly value the privilege of passing on to them the fruits of our labor.

Our heavenly Father thinks likewise. As an essential component of Him making us His own children, God has prepared an inheritance—imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for us. St. Paul reminds us in more than one place that we are heirs of God and co-heirs with our Lord Jesus. In other words, you and I share the inheritance that our Father has prepared for and promised to His Son.

What’s that inheritance given to Christ and to us? Is it eternal life? No doubt that is a significant aspect of it. The Scriptures, however, speak of an inheritance not only of life in heaven, but of life already now and what we do with that life. Regarding Christ’s inheritance, the Old Testament states that He rules the nations. Psalm 2: “*I will make the nations your heritage, and the ends of the earth your possession.*” Again in Daniel 7: “*And to [the Son of Man] was given dominion and glory and kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve Him, His dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and His kingdom one that shall not be destroyed.*” In short, our Lord Jesus inherited the nations, all of them. They are His, and He rules over them forever. It’s that inheritance of which we share a portion. We will rule with Him in heaven; we also rule with Him on earth.

So who are the people over whom we rule? Perhaps the better way to ask

the question is, then who are the people over whom we “serve?” since ruling in God’s family is all about serving “*For the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve and to give His life as a ransom for many*” (Mark 10). Our inheritance does not consist of myriads of peoples who are here to serve us, but are here to be served, that is, to be loved and cherished by us and our Lord forever. We are not just kings and queens, we are *servant* kings and queens. That is our inheritance.

St. John tells us that through Christ’s blood we have been made “*a kingdom and priests to our God*” and that we “*reign on earth*” (Revelation 5). All the nations, languages, and peoples of this earth are ours to “reign over,” that is to serve as co-rulers with Christ. We serve them even as our Lord served them, to give all that we have and to invest in the Business of “[*delivering*] from the dominion of darkness and [*transferring*] them to the Kingdom of [*God’s*] beloved Son” (Colossians 1), His Kingdom and ours, if indeed we are co-heirs with Him.

The rub in all of this is that the nations, languages, and peoples of this world don’t necessarily want to be delivered from darkness and transferred to our Kingdom. The Psalmist asks, “*Why do the nations conspire, and the peoples plot in vain?*” He goes on, “*The Kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together against the Lord and His anointed saying, ‘Let us burst their bonds asunder, and cast their cords from us’*” (Psalm 2). Note, the “bonds” the nations so disdain are those of unconditional love; the chords are of God’s grace and mercy. It’s sheer insanity for the nations not to want to “live under Christ and His Kingdom.” Yet that is the world that we have inherited to “rule” with our Lord.

So, St. Paul reminds us that in reigning with our Lord we will suffer with Him. Not in the way He suffered obviously, for we hold dear that “One died for all.” Only one suffered the pains of death and hell in order to secure eternal life for all. He suffered to earn life for all; we suffer to offer it to all through the proclamation of the Gospel. Still, we suffer with the same mind that is of our Lord—the people of this world are worth our suffering. They are precious to our Father and therefore precious to us. They are our inheritance now and forever.

Heirs inherit something. That something includes eternal life. It also includes God’s riches of the forgiveness of sins and the restoration it brings. These riches belong, not only to us, but to all of the earth. The Family Business is the business of giving to the world the riches we inherited with and because of our Lord. He earned them for us by His suffering and death. He freely and joyously shares them with us and calls us to share them with

the rest of the world.

**Prayer:** Lord God, You have made us rich in grace and mercy. Enable us to give out of this abundance to those in need of You. Amen.

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### **Day Seven: Co-Owners or Hired Hands?**

Consider two young ladies working in a family bakery. Both work hard, are conscientious, and greet customers with a smile. From the outside their dedication looks the same. But there is a significant difference in the two of them. One girl is the daughter of the bakery's owner and the other is a young university student working there for the summer. The daughter arrived at the bakery with her father at 4:30 that morning so that she could open the doors at 7:00 A.M. She will stay until the bakery closes at 8:00 P.M, then, clean up, lock up and make sure everything is properly prepared for the next day's operation. The co-ed arrived just before opening and after eight hours of work will leave for the day. She probably won't think about the bakery until she arrives again the next morning. For the co-ed the bakery is a good summer job. For the baker's daughter, it's the family business. She loves it. She knows it's story—what it cost her father to start it and grow it. She knows what it means to him that she works along side him in the shop. She knows that her service matters to the family and that she is contributing to building something with her family that matters to them and to others in the community. There's hard work, long hours, great responsibility and considerable risk. But it's her business. She will inherit it one day and very possibly pass it on to her own children.

Those who have owned and operated a family business understand that building and running it often require long hours of work and great personal sacrifice. But they also understand that their hard work and sacrifice is actually an investment. They are in it for the long haul. That creates a motivation entirely different from those who work in the business for a salary or hourly wage, but have no personal ownership. They may work diligently, but are not expected to invest more time or energy than that for which they are compensated.

That brings us to the primary focus of this week's devotions: we are heirs of God and co-heirs with His Son Jesus Christ. That means we co-own the Family Business with Him—a business dedicated to making all things new, things in heaven and things on the earth. It's the business of restoring every broken person and relationship to the original and divine purpose for which

they were made. God built the business with the cost of His own dear Son— His death on the cross. Then He invited us, His beloved children, to join Him in owning it and running it with Him. We didn't earn our place in the business; He simply gave it to us. As His children we matter to Him and working with Him in the business matters to Him. And the business, because we own it with the Lord, matters to us. Because it's our business, we consider our personal sacrifice of time, energy, and financial resources as investments. We're not hired hands. We're heirs of God and co-heirs with His Son, Jesus. What a difference that truly makes in our service to God and His world.

**Prayer:** Jesus, You are the Son not a hireling. You make us co-heirs in the Father's business. As we share in this business enable us to labor and not run when the work is hard. Amen.