



Issues, Etc.TM
Christ-Centered Cross-Focused Talk Radio

TRANSCRIPT

Rev. Todd Wilken, Host

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"Christian Vocation, Part 5: Youth, Widows and Everyone"

Guest:
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Sussex, WI

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WILKEN: We have been called a youth culture. I think that's a fair assessment – a criticism, probably more than anything – of pop American culture today. It's found its way into the church, where young is better, new is better; old is by definition out of date, obsolete, not worth even consideration. And when it applies to people in our culture or in the church, it can be very destructive. We do value youth. We value not only the trappings and the appearance and the

strength of youth, but we also value youth in a way that we do not value age. Now, that sets us apart – I think culturally, at the very least, from the vast majority of human history – where youth was not necessarily devalued, but age was most certainly valued. Not only for its wisdom and experience, but for other reasons as well that seem so ethereal, so transient, so impossible to find in American culture today.

Greetings, and welcome to *Issues, Etc.*, back live this Tuesday afternoon, the 3rd of January. I'm Todd Wilken. Thanks for tuning us in.

We're going to be talking the next hour, concluding our five-part series on Christian vocation, about the vocation of youth, then of widows and everyone in general. Pastor Peter Bender will be our guest. You can join us for the next hour, 1-877-623-MYIE. 877-623-6943. Send us an email right here in the studio: talkback@issuesetc.org. Since it is the conclusion of this series, we'll be happy to take your questions and comments of a general nature on Christian vocation – all that we've covered in the past week with Pastor Bender. 1-877-623-6943, talkback@issuesetc.org, or send us a Tweet @IssuesEtc.

Pastor Peter Bender is pastor of Peace Lutheran Church and Director of the Concordia Catechetical Academy in Sussex, Wisconsin. Pastor Bender, welcome back.

BENDER: Great to be back with you again, Todd.

WILKEN: The old adage that many of us grew up with, and were probably often reminded of by our parents, "Respect your elders." Does it have a Scriptural foundation?

BENDER: Well, of course it does. We can go back to the Ten Commandments themselves. "Honor your father and your mother." At the heart of honoring is respect, deference, love, and even obedience, submission, a yielding of one's will. We also find it in the New Testament: 1 Peter 5:5-6. Luther uses it in the Table of Duties where he tells the youth to be submissive to those who are older, and to clothe oneself with humility toward one another and so forth. But we finally and ultimately find it in Jesus, who submits to His earthly parents, Mary

and Joseph. He submits to the civil authorities. And in all of His acts of submission He commends Himself to God, who promises to do Him good through such submission.

WILKEN: Now, it seems as though you're saying there is a general principle that is derived from a more specific one here, and that is respect for authority of all kinds, beginning with father and mother, commanded there in the Ten Commandments. But it applies outside the family. Am I reading you correctly?

BENDER: Oh, absolutely. The Fourth Commandment that speaks of honor to father and mother is the foundation, it's the building block for honor and obedience to all temporal authority – even that of workers to their employer and so forth. And this became necessary because of the problem of sin, which is fundamentally self-centered, egocentric. And so the command to submit is necessary because the flesh is never wanting to submit, and always is living for the self in a destructive way toward others. When the New Testament says that love is the fulfillment of the Law, it's finally in Jesus that we really see this submission take on its fullest form, and where it comes to fruition. And He shows us in His submitting what love is – which is not to live for the self but for the benefit of another, even those who don't deserve it, like the parent or the elder who may be quite overbearing, quite unrealistic, or quite unfair in their demands. But when we suffer to allow our elders to be our elders, we learn something as Christians, most especially, about what Christ suffered when He yielded to His father's will to die for us.

WILKEN: Now, we're talking about this, of course, in the context of 21st century America, and we cannot ignore the fact that although rebellion of youth is nothing unique to the American culture, Americans have in the last 50 years – and that's how far we

have to go back to get to the heady days of rebellion in our country, culturally – but for the last 50 years we have codified, we have elevated to the level of a positive virtue rebellion and a certain – what we consider to be a certain healthy disrespect for authority and for age. Speak to that – respond to that, if you would.

BENDER: Well, I think it's built into the fabric of our country. At our country's founding – the idea of freedom of speech and the rights of the individual are certainly embedded in our country's founding. But there was still in our psyche, the idea of honor and respect for authority. But when you take the ideals of human freedom as they are sometimes elucidated today in popular culture, in the media – with all due respect, Todd, in talk radio – people get the idea that they can say and do anything that they want because they have the personal right to do it. And that can be, in a certain sense, the logical outcome of this idea of the freedom of the human person to be and to do and to say whatever he or she wants. And lost is the idea that the rule of law is necessary because of the problem of human sin and wickedness, which is fundamentally self-centered. We live in – we're sometimes called a democracy, but we're a democratic republic, and a republic is governed by laws. But we've kind of lost that in our society. Laws exist for the protection of those who cannot protect themselves, and to protect individuals and groups from the tyranny of other individuals or people who are stronger than they are. And that goes to the whole notion of something that is sometimes lost in the Christian's evaluation of our American culture in which we find ourselves. And that is that government and laws all exist because of the problem of man's sin, which is fundamentally self-centered. And if it were not for sin, there would be no need for laws, and there would be no need for government, and there would be no need for submission to the authority of elders.

WILKEN: We've got a few minutes before we take our first break, Pastor Bender. You mentioned this before, but I'd like you to go into some more detail. The passage that you had talked about, 1 Peter 5, beginning at verse 5, begins, "Young men, in the same way." So please, if you would, take us back to what that refers to so that we have the context for Peter's admonition that young men be submissive to those who are older.

BENDER: Right. In the entire first epistle of Peter, he's speaking to Christians and giving them an understanding of what their vocation is in this world – we are pilgrims, and we are on a journey through this world, living as a holy priesthood for the benefit of others. And this "in the same way" strings together a whole series of passages that talk about husbands and wives and youth and so forth. So "in the same way" ultimately takes us back to Christ and how He, in faith and in love for His Father, lived in His calling. And His calling was to trust in the Father's love and good and gracious will for our salvation. And that's why He submitted Himself to Pontius Pilate – in the same way wives submit to their husbands, and in the same way husbands are considerate of the weaker position of their wife, and in the same way youth are also to submit to their elders. So the "in the same way" takes us back to Christ, and how He submitted to God the Father's good and gracious will for us. Even though it meant His suffering and ultimately, His death.

WILKEN: Do we have a firm grasp on what the apostle is talking about when he describes humility? That is, "Clothe yourselves with humility." What is he really talking about there? One minute before our break.

BENDER: Humility here is not to be thought of simply as some sort of virtue that we conjure up. But it is an attribute of faith, and to be clothed – see, that's baptismal language. "As many of you as were

baptized into Christ have put on Christ.” So as Christians, and at the heart of Christian vocation is that we are called to believe the Gospel, and we are called in our baptism to receive Christ and all that He is, and to say “Amen, this is good and true,” and to live under the cloak of His humility – His humility that led Him to the cross, to His suffering and death, and His humility, which by the grace of God and by the Spirit of God is then manifest in us toward others.

WILKEN: Pastor Peter Bender is our guest. We’re concluding a five-part series with him on Christian vocation, talking presently about the young. We’ll go on to talk about something that St. Paul considers to be not only a Christian vocation, but in some sense an office – small “o” – in the New Testament Church: widows. And then we’ll talk about the general admonition of Scripture to everyone in their vocations, whatever their vocation may be.

It’s Tuesday afternoon, January the 3rd. We’re coming to you live. 1-877-623-MYIE, talkback@issuesetc.org, or send us a Tweet @IssuesEtc.

[BREAK]

WILKEN: Welcome back to *Issues, Etc.* We’re talking about the vocation of youth; a little bit later, youth and everyone. Pastor Peter Bender is our guest. He’s pastor of Peace Lutheran Church and Director of the Concordia Catechetical Academy in Sussex, Wisconsin. Tell us a little bit about the CCA, the Concordia Catechetical Academy.

BENDER: Sure. The CCA is an auxiliary of our congregation here in Wisconsin, Peace Lutheran Church in Sussex. And very simply, because of my work in catechesis over the last 24 years, the congregation started this little publishing house and we run an annual symposium on a different part of the Small Catechism of Luther, or how to do the task of catechesis. The CCA exists

for the promotion of the Small Catechism and faithful Lutheran catechesis in our own congregation and to the church at large. And we’ve got a lot of folks that are interested in the materials that we have to offer, both in the United States and overseas.

WILKEN: Folks, you can find out more about the Concordia Catechetical Academy and a link at our website, issuesetc.org. Go to the “Listen on Demand” page.

There is a lot to say about youth, and I’ve got a couple more questions. It is actually a quotation that is found there in that epistle of St. Peter, the 1st epistle. “God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble.” Do we know where that comes from? And what is it that the apostle’s telling us?

BENDER: As I said before the break, we should not think of humility as a virtue – in other words, He’s rewarding the humble because they have this virtue of humility – but as an adjective that is descriptive of what it is to have faith in Christ. And that’s found throughout the Scriptures: the idea that faith is characterized by humility. And I think when you’re talking about youth, and one of the things that youth object to – sometimes youth are very idealistic, Todd, and they actually can often times have their finger on the truth and on what is right, and on what is the cause of justice and so forth. And they can be like Don Quixote sometimes, chasing the windmill, fighting against it, wanting to stand up for what is right. And the idea of suffering for and because of something that opposes what is right that conflicts with what we know to be right, but we have no other choice but to suffer it, is a lesson that we all have to learn. And the proud is the unbelieving who say, “There is nothing I can learn from this. I must demand what is right as I see it.” But the humility of faith defers to God. And it does so because faith is fixed, ultimately, upon the humility and humiliation of Christ,

who suffered the greatest injustice. And out of that, God accomplished His greatest good.

WILKEN: As a general idea, when he says, “God opposes the proud,” what is the apostle warning us of?

BENDER: He’s warning us of unbelief, and of making a god out of ourselves. And humility on the other side of the coin is the attribute of faith, and what it is to live trusting not in what we can see, but in what we cannot see. “How can God bring anything good out of this? I do not know, but I’m going to trust Him in this situation with these overbearing parents, or with this elder that is out of control. I’ll pray for them. I will do my best to do good to them, even though they don’t deserve it. And I will commend them to God in His mercy. And I will trust that when He says He’s going to do me good in this situation, He will. And perhaps there are greater lessons to learn.”

WILKEN: There’s a connection here between a vocation that we talked about in Part 1, when we talked about bishops, pastors, preachers, and this one. And it comes in Paul’s letters to Timothy, where he instructs Timothy, even as pastor, to regard older men as fathers, older women as mothers, younger men as brothers, younger women as sisters. Seems to be an application of this respect for the elders, even in the vocation of pastor.

BENDER: That’s true. And I think this is what it is to live as a family of believers under the grace of God. We’re fond of quoting St. Paul in Galatians, where he says, “There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave or free, male or female. All are one in Christ.” In terms of the salvation that we enjoy as a gift of God’s grace, that’s absolutely true. But it in no way destroys the various stations in life that we have. And God, in Christ, came to redeem the creation, not to obliterate what it is to be husband and wife and father and mother,

and to have these various offices. And so in the Church, in a certain sense, there is to be reconstituted what God wished for humanity in the Garden of Eden: what a real man is, and what a real woman is, and a husband and wife, and father and mother and children and so forth. And that’s reflected in how He encourages the pastors to live – again, this is how humility is incarnate in the pastoral office, where they treat the older brothers in the faith as fathers, and the ones with whom they share a similar age category as brothers, or as sisters, and the older women as mothers. That’s what it is to live by grace and not by works.

WILKEN: Then let’s talk about – in the case of St. Paul, he writes to women, widows. These are people who had a vocation, that of wife, mother, perhaps of sister and daughter, but had been found in the New Testament Church because of death to be without husband, children, or any other siblings or family whatsoever. And one might be tempted to say that they no longer have a vocation.

BENDER: Right. And you have put your finger on something that I have discovered in my ministry as a parish pastor. How often it’s been the case where a wife in particular – but it also happens for husbands – has lost their spouse. And then they will say things like, “My whole life is taken away from me. I loved being a wife. I loved being wife to my husband, and now I’m nothing. I have nothing to live for.” And we actually err, as pastors, in our counsel of them if we allow that kind of assertion to stand. We all have a calling in this world. It is to live by faith in Christ. And that calling takes various shapes, and is lived out in various offices. And we should actually assert – now, we have to do this gently in this time of grieving and patience for a message like this to be received – but we do have to uphold the idea that the office of widow is exactly that. It is an office. It is a calling before God. And I think that’s what St. Paul is talking about

when, in 1 Timothy 5:5-6 he says, “The widow who is really in need and left all alone puts her hope in God and continues night and day to pray, and to ask God for help.” That’s what the widow does. Her office is an office of grieving, and her grieving over the loss of her husband is to draw her closer to her Lord, number one, that she, receiving from her Lord, the Bridegroom who lived and died and now lives again never to die, by receiving His grace she is enabled to find new purpose in her life, and oftentimes within the Church and in acts of charity and mercy within the community of faith.

WILKEN: We’re talking with Pastor Peter Bender about the various vocations that we find ourselves in, Christian vocations. Right now: the – can we call it the office of widow, Pastor Bender? For the New Testament Church?

BENDER: I think that at least we ought to call it a vocation. It’s a calling. I think we should, because we would fully affirm that whatever God permits to come into our lives He does for our good. And so that doesn’t mean that the loss of a spouse is anything pleasurable that we wish for. But if God permits it to come into our lives, then He intends to do us good through this loss, through this suffering. Just as He intended, absolutely, to do us good through the suffering of His Son, when His Son was denied life and every pleasure of this life for our good, and ultimately our reconciliation to God. Then there has to be good that He will teach us through this. And it may be the sufficiency of His grace and how in our suffering such a horrific loss – such as the death of a spouse whom we have loved and cared for, perhaps for decades – we are given the opportunity to show forth in our lives as a widow or a widower the glories of God’s grace in Christ to those who have also suffered such losses. And sometimes they are on the outside. Sometimes they are unbelievers. And they can see in us if we

are a widower or a widow who has lost a spouse that there is still hope. And that’s found in Christ, who suffered the loss of all things for our salvation. And in Christ there is a blessed communion and fellowship that will endure for eternity.

WILKEN: Pastor Peter Bender is our guest. We’re talking about Christian vocation: widows. A little bit later, we’ll talk about the general instruction of Christians in whatever their vocation may be.

I’m Todd Wilken. This is *Issues, Etc.* It’s Tuesday afternoon, January the 3rd.

[BREAK]

WILKEN: Welcome back to *Issues, Etc.* I’m Todd Wilken. We’ve got another half hour with Pastor Peter Bender, concluding a five-part series with him over the last week on Christian vocation. Today, we talked about youth. We’re now talking about widows and in a few minutes, general instruction from Scripture to whoever you are. Whatever your vocation may be, what does the Bible say? Because, well, that’s the nature of Scripture in many ways. It doesn’t always outline in great detail. In fact, the theme that has emerged from our conversation with Pastor Bender is this notion of Christian vocation has far more to do with specific instructions, dos and don’ts, according to your station in life, and far more with the instruction that the Christian is to live by faith before God, and love before his neighbor. And we’ll talk about that before our conversation concludes.

Pastor Bender, the reason I asked before the break about widows as an office in the church is that it seems as though, given what we know from the book of Acts and Paul’s epistles, generally speaking, that widows did serve a specific function. They were given something to do by the Church and in the Church, especially with respect to other women. Talk about that, if you will.

BENDER: Sure. They were given works of charity and so forth, very specifically to perform in the Church. So in 1 Timothy 5, this is brought out by St. Paul. He talks about “the company of widows.” And they’re not to be taken into that company of widows too quickly, unless they’re really devoted to the work of charity and mercy that the Church is called upon to give to those who are in need. And so, talking about in 1 Timothy 5:10, the lodging of strangers and the washing of the saints’ feet and relieving the afflicted and so forth – these were all parts of tasks. If you think of the women that surrounded Jesus and attended to Him and the apostles’ needs throughout His ministry – in a certain sense, the company of the widows entered into that kind of diaconal work in the early Church.

WILKEN: So much so that, I think in some cases, they were to live from the Church in terms of their resources, weren’t they?

BENDER: Well, that’s right. And that’s why, in the 1 Timothy passage, St. Paul talks about those widows who are really in need – without husband, without children, without anyone to care for them. In a society and culture where there was no Social Security, there were no safety nets as we think of them as 21st century Americans, the Church was there to care for them. And then they were a part of the Church’s care for others, which is a stunning thing too. Here they were in need, without a head and without earthly support, and were being cared for by the Church that they might be part of the Church’s outreach to those in need.

I think another thing that needs to be addressed in terms of the context of that passage – in 1 Timothy 5, St. Paul talks about the widow who lives for pleasure is dead even while she lives. What is he actually talking about? Well, this living for pleasure in the early Church time and that Greco-Roman culture might be that a woman would feel compelled – “I have no

one to care for me, I have no husband, I have no offspring.” And therefore she might enter into a trade as a prostitute in order to provide for herself. And this becomes, in that 1 Timothy passage, a rebuke against doing that. What is the contemporary context? I think that’s less likely to happen today. However, I have found many a man or a woman that feels compelled to marry quickly anyone that comes along because they’re grieving over the death of their spouse – and that may be a non-Christian. Rather than commending themselves to God to care for them, and drawing near to the Church and the ministry of Word and Sacrament, they lose faith, as it were, and attach themselves to someone who is not a Christian, and not a practicing one.

WILKEN: So today, we are not without widows, Pastor Bender. Now, in our American context, many of them are not destitute but in fact pretty well off. Sometimes, it is the elderly women and especially the widows who form the backbone of many church budgets. A pastor of 24 years’ experience has probably learned that as well. So how do we speak to widows and to their particular vocation in the Church today – where it’s not an issue of them lacking means of support or family, but yet they are widows.

BENDER: Sure. I think we need to make sure that they understand themselves always to be members of Christ’s bride, the Church. And that when their loyalties sometimes felt divided before with a spouse, they’re now given the opportunity to receive from their Lord Jesus everything that He has to give in teaching, in preaching, in the Sacramental ministry of the congregation, so that they then can be fully engaged in the congregation’s ministry of mercy to others, and to give them opportunities to do that. But first they have to be receivers, as we all must, and to live by faith in the Son of God who loved us and gave Himself for us – to all think of

ourselves as members of His bride, the Church. And even if we have lost our spouse, that doesn't change. And that primary relationship where He is husband to us, caring for us, and receiving that care is what enables us to live by faith in Him, in love toward others in our vocation.

WILKEN: So would this preclude in any way – I think someone might just wonder that if a woman has become a widow or a man become a widower, that they, if they read these things in the New Testament, think, “Well, I can't remarry.”

BENDER: Very definitely they're allowed to remarry. But only in the Lord, as St. Paul says in 1 Corinthians 7. “It is better to marry than to burn, but only in the Lord. We are not to be unequally yoked with those who do not believe in Christ.” And so we are to pray for them, and they are to be encouraged by us to pray that if it is God's will to give them another spouse, that He would do so, but that the spouse would be a God-fearing Christian man or woman, and that they would have the patience to wait upon the Lord. I have this little prayer in this section on the Table of Duties where we say, “In their loneliness and sorrow, draw them closer to Your Divine Service and deliver them from the temptation to seek fulfillment from the pleasures of life that can never truly satisfy. Teach them to believe that they have a sacred calling as widows to live by faith.” And for the widowers, this line: “Teach them to pray to You for help to live in their calling, to serve their neighbors in love, and to commend their future to Your gracious will. Grant them grace to remain single or provide them with a faithful Christian wife or husband.”

WILKEN: Let's talk about the “everyone” category. And this really isn't the catchall at the end, but this is a good summary of what the general subject has been all along: Christian vocation.

BENDER: Right. Martin Luther, in his concluding section of verses that apply to everyone, quotes Romans 13:9 and then 1 Timothy 2:1. Romans 13:9, “The Commandments are summed up in this one rule: Love your neighbor as yourself.” Or as I like to say, “in place of yourself,” which is ultimately a description of Jesus' love for us. He sets aside His divine rights, His prerogatives, His power, His glory. He empties Himself out completely for us in His humiliating suffering and death for our salvation. He loves us in place of Himself. And that fulfills the Law. Every one of the Commandments – first table of the Law, love to God; the second table of the Law, love to the neighbor – is always a love for God that desires Him above all things and a love for the neighbor that desires their good, and to do for them whatever will serve their greatest and ultimate good. And that's why Jesus was compelled by that love to lay down His life for us. And so when we speak of Christian vocation – again, I've got to go back to that idea that vocation is the call of the Gospel. “I love you,” says the Lord Jesus. “I forgive you. I have died for you. I forgive you all your sins. Do not be afraid. Trust in me.” This call of the Gospel – the Holy Spirit calls us to faith in Christ by the Gospel. That's at the heart of Christian vocation. And when we, by the grace and Spirit of God through the call of the Gospel come to faith in Christ, that faith naturally manifests itself in the kinds of descriptions of love that we've seen throughout this entire series in the passages quoted under the Table of Duties. Those are the concrete ways, the incarnational ways in which faith in Christ's love manifests itself then in love toward whoever the neighbor is. And at the heart of that – and I think this is so very important to emphasize – is that it is a love for the unworthy. It is a love for the undeserving. It's a love for those who are your enemies. It's a love for those who hate you. Because that's the love of God in Christ in the Gospel for us. While we were the enemies of God, Christ died for us. “In

this is love, not that we loved God but that He first loved us. And so that's the love, then, that we are called to in the call of the Gospel to faith in Jesus: a love for the unworthy and the undeserving. And that's how, then, Christ is manifest in us, in our vocation as Christians to the world.

WILKEN: We're talking with Pastor Peter Bender, pastor of Peace Lutheran Church and Director of the Concordia Catechetical Academy in Sussex, Wisconsin, concluding our five-part series on Christian vocation. More on that love and that faith toward God in the last ten minutes. Stay tuned.

[BREAK]

WILKEN: Welcome back to *Issues, Etc.* I'm Todd Wilken. We're talking about Christian vocation, concluding our five-part series with Pastor Peter Bender.

Pastor Bender, you spoke before about that love. How is that connected to – as we often say in our Lutheran parlance, that we live before God by faith and before the neighbor in love? How are love and faith connected together?

BENDER: Love and faith are connected together in this way: first of all, faith is the passive hand of receptivity that receives God's love in Christ as a gift, freely given: the forgiveness of all of our sins. That love of God, received in the Gospel by faith, creates faith and it also manifests itself and creates love for the neighbor, and particularly those who are unworthy of that love. Luther had the saying that faith, that is to say, the faith that receives Christ and lays hold of His forgiveness, is a busy and active thing. It doesn't need to be told what to do, because before it is even told what to do, it has already gone out and done it. And I can imagine that for some listening to the program over the last five sessions on Christian vocation have had times where they've said, "But Pastor Bender, Pastor Wilken, I don't love like you're describing. I

don't love the loveless. I don't love the unworthy." And the temptation, then, is to drive ourselves back into ourselves and into some sort of strength of our own. "I'll just try harder, but the more I try, it just doesn't work." What they need more of, what we all need more of is the Gospel. What we all need more of is the sweet word of absolution, Christ's forgiveness. What we need more of is when we feel that our love is so wanting, to cry out, "God, be merciful to me, a sinner." And most importantly, to hear afresh again and again, God's precious forgiveness and love for me. And trust that God will bring forth out of that love renewed love to the neighbor. And that's the relationship between faith in Christ and love to the neighbor.

WILKEN: This is an email sent anonymously on the subject of the vocation of youth. "How do we deal with a child who is unrepentant and seems to scorn his vocation? We share the Law often, but that can actually inflame the sin. How do we find the Law/Gospel balance as parents so that our child will embrace his vocation within the family?"

BENDER: In order for there to be true repentance, there must not only be the Law, but also concrete proclamation and manifestation of the Gospel in the Christian home. And what I mean by that is: a lot of Christian parents are under the mistaken notion that they cannot say, "I love you. I forgive you. I accept you," except when their children are asking for forgiveness and saying that they are sorry for what they have done. In other words, unless they say, "Dad, I'm sorry I did that. I'm sorry I've treated you this way," Dad will never say, "I love you. I forgive you." And that's never the way it should be for us as Christian parents. We're to proclaim our love and forgiveness for our children, even if they are impenitent. Even if they don't acknowledge their sin. The constancy of our love for them – nothing proclaims to the Christian child the

character of undeserved love than to hear that love proclaimed to them when they are recalcitrant. To see that nothing has changed in heart of Mom or Dad toward me. They still love me. Even though they're upset with what I have done, they still love me. That can send a powerful message. It may take weeks or months or years to sink in. But some Christian parents, under the mistaken notion that they should never say "I forgive you," they should never say "I love you," until that child finally crumbles and says "I'm sorry for what I have done."

WILKEN: When we talk about our vocation as Christians, someone might simply ask, "I don't know what mine is." And I think we started our series in helping us locate ourselves, our station in life. Let's end that way again. It's such a simple thing, so counterintuitive, especially in an age when a lot of Christian writing, to the effect, wants to make it all about dos and don'ts and particular minutia of Christian living. How do we simply understand our vocation in terms of where God has put us in life?

BENDER: Yeah, I like the way you put it at the end there: where God has put us. I think for us as Christians, we should say – and this might sound almost contradictory to what we've been talking about – we have one vocation, one calling: to trust in Christ Jesus, who loved us and gave Himself for us on the cross. Where that faith is then lived out are all of those other particular stations of life: husbands, wives, fathers, mothers, children, workers, employers, supervisors, widows, youth, and so forth. Are you a man? Are you married? Do you have brothers? Do you have sisters? Those are all where you live your faith in Christ. And I think that's an effective way to do it. It also keeps the focus clearly upon Jesus.

WILKEN: Pastor Peter Bender is pastor of Peace Lutheran Church and Director of the Concordia Catechetical Academy in

Sussex, Wisconsin. Pastor Bender, you have been very, very generous with your time with us in this series. Thank you very much. It's been excellent.

BENDER: Oh, you're welcome, Todd. Thank you.

WILKEN: God simply puts you down amongst neighbors. We don't get to choose them. We think we do, but we don't get to choose them. He chooses them for us, and He chooses us for them. This is the way God serves the neighbor through you. He chooses neighbors for you, and He chooses you for the neighbor, and He has chosen us all in Christ so that the benefits of Christ might flow to everyone. Make no mistake about it, when the baker bakes his bread – and he may be an unbelieving baker – and the person who sits at the other end of the chain of provision on God's part might also be an unbelieving eater of bread, but God is providing for Christ's sake alone. That's what we confess in the Catechism. "All this out of fatherly divine goodness and mercy, without any merit or worthiness in me." It is all for Christ's sake. This is how He serves the neighbor. But it's also how the Christian is called to live in faith. It has a certain shape to it. It's not an ethereal, misty thing out there. "I live by faith" – what does that mean? But it has a certain shape to it. It is shaped just like where God has put you in life: husband, father, wife, mother, child, citizen, maybe pastor or employee or employer, or maybe widow, young and old. God shapes the Christian life, the life that is lived by faith in daily repentance, remembering one's Baptism where God called you into His family as His child, and the forgiveness of sins. It's all lived out there, right where God has put you in life for Christ's sake.

I'm Todd Wilken. Talk with you tomorrow. Thanks for listening to *Issues, Etc.*

