**Module 5: Satisfaction and Sustainability**

 “Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for thereby some have entertained angels unawares” (Hebrews 13:2).

**Devotion**

It is challenging to find satisfaction in today’s America, whether in urban areas or the countryside. There are a number of factors that have changed the nature of work and life balance in the last several decades along with shifts in culture and family structures. These changes include:

* Less job security
* Fewer church and community connections
* Greater addiction and mental health challenges
* Less family support and connection

Reduced to simplest terms: many Americans are unrelentingly working themselves to death.

Under these conditions, little time or energy is left for fellowship or community or joy, in spite of the fact that a community valuing “conversation and consolation,” where members share burdens, would bring life to singles, couples, and families. Many church experts worry over the lack of church participation by people in the Millennial and Gen-Z generations. One overlooked reason that these folks have less involvement in church is simply because their opportunities have become circumscribed and as a result they are overinvested in their work. They have little free time for hobbies, pleasure, or relaxation.

Lutheran theology has a great advantage over those theologies that assert that if you or your culture is not Christian, then it is not of God. Lutherans have long affirmed, as H. Richard Niebuhr put it, not “Christ transforming culture” (as if culture per se needs evangelization) but instead “Christ and culture in paradox.” That is, God works both through distinctive Christian ministry, but, paradoxically, works also amongst those who do not name Christ as Lord. There is strong biblical precedent for this view. Jonah was sent to Nineveh, which was not Hebrew but instead a city of the Hebrews’ oppressors. And, even the Persian king, Cyrus, was designated (like Christ) as a savior, a “messiah” (Isaiah 45:1). In the gospels, Jesus also reached out to various gentiles such as Romans and Greeks and not only the daughters and sons of Abraham and Sarah.

If Americans—including rural Americans—could take a breather, they would find that worship grants them a rejuvenating Sabbath. In worship, God feeds people with the living word and the life-giving sacraments and reshapes them to be people who from the first and at their core are not doers but receivers. God’s love flows to us from the gospel, and thereby we become channels of that love in community. Because God has been so kind to us in Christ, we too can be kind to others and so build up healthy community.

The Lutheran approach to justification by grace alone through faith alone likewise teaches us not to judge others. All men and women—not just church folks—are in God’s hands, belong to God’s creation, and are vehicles through which God continues to create the world. In other words, God has much to teach us through non-Christians, and we do well to humbly learn from them.

**Prayer**

*God, thank you for giving me the church not as my possession but as the body which nurtures me. I thank you for all the good I have received in the church: the promise of new life, the forgiveness of my sins, and the anticipation of eternal life. May my congregation continue to fulfill its mission in its wider community. Amen.*