

Good Morning!

Today the Epistle and the Gospel both talk about the concept of laboring. It is also about generosity and rewarding the laborers. I think that the core of the message however, is not to be anxious about earthly things, but to love things heavenly. Not to focus on what others want or get or are doing, but to carefully consider what we are going to do once we come to believe.

What we often desire is self-serving and what Christ is calling us to do is world-serving. In Paul's letter to the Philippians, Paul runs face first into this as he wonders if dying in hope of heaven is what he would prefer to do instead of putting in the hard work – or suffering as it is translated for us – of doing good here and now.

Once we say we believe, once we understand that God is real, that God is love, and light, and life itself, it is then we need to ask ourselves, "What is it we are working for?" and "What motivates us?"

Speaking for myself, I get caught up in my day-to-day life, and I get motivated to say and do things that I think other people want to hear and come to expect. What is it I am working for? Money, respect, praise? And what motivates me? Well...the thought of gaining money, respect and praise. What would happen if we had a presence of mind to remember that God is real, that God is love, and light, and life? What if I cared more about what Jesus thinks of what I say and do, than what other people think of what I say and do?

What happens when we do not get the money, respect and praise we think we deserve? In her weekly message, the Rev. Liz put it very well, "Whine, whine, whine." No matter what we get, humans always seem to want more. I remember being fresh out of college, living on my own, struggling to make ends meet. I thought, "If I could just have \$3,500, I could take care of all my debt, fix my car, get a new coat, and I would be ok." A few years later, we had bought a house, and I thought, "If I could just get \$10,000 all at once we could -- insert here whatever you like. And again a few years later, "Wow, monthly income is good, if we just had \$25K, we could...you get the point! I was far past the \$3500 I thought would totally change my world at age 22. Even now, I buy an occasional lottery ticket because, "If I just had a million dollars..." This sounds a lot like greed, and not much like gratitude. "I am grateful for what I have, but..." It seems like there is never enough. We are always looking to see who has more, keeping up with the Jones' they used to say. Looking at what your neighbor has, judging yourself against them and wanting it. And when we do not get it...whine, whine, whine. I think we all do it. Are you with me here? Do you envy others? Oh, hey is that the new iPhone X? Did you all see I got a new car? I think we need to focus, be still some time every day, and express gratitude for what we have. I know I need to do that, or I get caught up in wants over needs. I forget to say thank you, and I forget what I really want – God's Love and God's R E S P E C T.

Anyone know who Thomas Paine was? I ask this because Thomas had a very good idea what he was working for and what motivated him. Thomas Paine has a claim to the title *The Father of the American Revolution and author of Common Sense*, which crystallized sentiment for independence in 1776. Paine's original title for the pamphlet was *Plain Truth* and Paine's friend, suggested *Common Sense* instead.

Thomas said some other things, and one of them was this: "*The World is my country, all mankind are my brethren, and to do good is my religion*".

Funny, but when it comes to building a nation *Plain Truth* and *Common Sense* seem to go hand in hand, but when thinking about God and working to advance God's kingdom, the *Plain Truth*, that we need to follow Jesus and our *Common Sense* about how to thrive in this time and place are seemingly in conflict with each other. How do we thrive, get ahead, care for our wants and needs and answer the call to give to the poor, and stand against hate? That stuff takes money and time – the two things we seem to feel we need the most. Time and money are the things we seem to treasure more than our neighbors – we ask if there is enough for us first.

Now what? How do I stay present, focused on the big picture and not on myself, and keep jealousy and pride from contaminating my soul? It would be easy for me to say the answer is in the Bible, because it is. But I found a more helpful answer in the moment from another source – Facebook! "*When you can't control what's happening, challenge yourself to control the way you respond to what's happening. That is where your power is.*"

Now apply this to the Gospel today. Here we have workers who were out in the field from early morning, laboring hard for a fair days pay. They were so happy that morning to get such an opportunity. Then at the end of the day, they see the folks who only worked a few hours getting a full days pay. They start thinking – I swear that thinking is our blessing and our curse – they assume that they will be getting a bonus, in their minds they think of the extras they will enjoy with that bonus, they make plans to come back tomorrow, they think how they will spend their extra money and they build an expectation beyond what they originally agreed to. And then, this happens: they get a fair wage for the work they did, and they are outraged, disappointed, ticked off, and angry at the people who were paid the same for less work. Why are we concerned about what other people are getting? Last time I checked, jealousy and envy were deadly sins. And then how do we treat those more fortunate than us, do we act out and seek revenge? Has anyone noticed the number of sins I have mentioned? Keep counting. envy, revenge, pride...

I have focused on the laborers, but what about the landowner? Was the landowner conducting business in a customary way? Were his fellow landowners, vying for the same labor, pool happy with his actions? Was what he did a smart business move? Would Jesus have been proud of him? Was he treating the laborers the way we hope Jesus treats us, as children -- all deserving a full portion of the kingdom -- regardless of whether we repented at age 18 or age 88? Who would you deny entrance to the kingdom of heaven? What about people who provided well for their families, but ignored the poor and focused only on their need of money? What if they realized how foolish they had

been when they reached their 70s and repented? Would you slam the door to salvation in their face for the years they were self-serving? News flash, we are not the judge of others -- ever. What kind of expectations do you have being a Christian? Do you rejoice in the good fortune of others? Are you grateful for all that you have in every situation?

Corrie ten Boom was a Dutch watchmaker and Christian who, along with her father and other family members, helped many Jews escape the Nazi Holocaust during World War II. She was imprisoned for her actions. Her most famous book, *The Hiding Place*, is a biography that recounts the story of her family's efforts, as well as her time spent in a concentration camp.

The two sisters Betsy and Corrie were put in the concentration camp, and Betsy whined because there were lice. They prayed every night as they had snuck in a Bible, and the verse they read over and over again was, "Give thanks in all circumstances." They were allowed to have their prayer meetings because the officers in charge would not enter, and left them alone, not raping and beating them -- because of the lice! Betsy could never understand what "Give thanks in all circumstances." meant since they were in such dire conditions, until it became known that it was the lice that saved them from further torment.

How many deadly sins did you hear today in my sermon? Envy, revenge, greed, pride, sloth...is it clear that it is sin that takes us away from God?

What would happen if we remembered that God is real, that God is love, and light and life itself? What if we all cared more about what Jesus thinks of what we say and do, than what other people think? Remember, "When you can't control what's happening, challenge yourself to control the way you respond to what's happening." That is where your power is. And if we manage not to whine too much, keep loving God and each other, and remembering to give thanks in all circumstances, we will discover true joy. I leave you with one more quote. This one is from the Harry Potter character, Sirius Black. "*We've all got light and dark inside of us, what matters is how we choose to act on it.*" Amen