

“Labor Day: It’s a Blessing to Work”

Date: August 31, 2014

Place: Lakewood UMC

Texts: Genesis 3:14-23; 2 Thessalonians 3:6-13

Theme: Labor Day, work

Occasion: Labor Day Sunday

A joke to begin this Labor Day sermon. Pope Julius II hired Michelangelo to paint the Sistine Chapel. Julius was a taskmaster. Michelangelo worked day and night, on his back, hot wax and paint dropping on his face.

In winter he worked in heavy gloves; in summer the heat drove him to exhaustion. Finally the magnificent frescoes were complete. Pope Julius came to see them. He stared long and hard, until Michelangelo could stand it no longer. “What do you think?”

“Not bad,” Julius conceded. “But for this kind of money, I expected two coats.” Some bosses are impossible to please, and many people look at the jobs as sheer drudgery. And many are underpaid with less than ideal working conditions.

Today I’d like to take a look at what the Scriptures have to say about *work*. After all, this is the weekend when we honor and pay tribute to all of the working women and men who keep our country going. Labor Day is not a religious holiday, but it is worth talking about.

Work ought to be celebrated. But that’s not how most people look at it. Most people feel as though work is a kind of curse. It’s something we have to do, so that we can eat and pay our bills. If they could, don’t you think that most people would prefer not to work?

Think about the expressions we have in our culture. Wednesday is “Hump Day,” meaning there are only two more days

until the weekend. TGIF may be one of the more popular abbreviations in the English language. “Thank God It’s Friday.” Many people live for the weekend when they don’t have to go to their jobs. That is, unless you have a job that forces you to work on Saturdays and Sundays.

This morning, I’d like to suggest that work is not a curse. I know there are those of you who would refer to the book of Genesis, to where God cursed Adam and told him he would have to earn his living by the sweat of his brow.

God was unhappy about the rebellion in the garden, and so God cursed humanity. One of the curses was that we should toil for a living. It seems that even in the Bible, work is a curse. But look again. If you have a Bible, please turn to Genesis 2, verses 7 and 8 and then verse 15. (page four of the Pew Bible).

Now notice this. In the beginning, before the Fall and the Curse, we read that man was placed in the Garden, and was given the command to work it and take care of it. Human beings were given the responsibility of helping God take care of creation, in the beginning. We were to be co-creators, partners with God in the good Creation.

Imagine that! Before the Fall, work was a good thing. We were helping God to accomplish the things that God wanted done. But after the Fall, work became tedious; it made us anxious. Now, if that were the end of the story, we would still be living under the curse. Work would still be nothing but drudgery.

But hear this – Jesus Christ came to set us free from the curse. Those who have accepted Christ into their hearts have become a new creation. 2 Corinthians 5:17 says, “If anyone is in Christ he is a

new creation. The old has passed away, behold the new has come.” Do you see what that means?

We’re no longer under the curse. Jesus Christ has set us free. Hear the good news! We are no longer under the curse; we are under the cross. We don’t live by the rules of the Fall; we live by the rules of Grace. In Jesus Christ our sins have been forgiven; our debt has been paid and we are free from the curse.

In Christ, we live in a new reality. It is a blessing to work. It’s a blessing because we can freely and joyfully serve the God who redeems us. “Behold, the new has come and the old has passed away.” Celebrate! The curse is broken!

A story, to illustrate the difference between the old way and the new way of life. One day, a man was walking along and he came upon a construction crew building a new church. He asked the first man what he was doing. The man said, “I’m working for 11 bucks an hour.”

The man walked around the building and talked to another worker. “What are you doing?” he asked. The man replied, “I’m laying bricks, can’t you see?” When he spoke to a third man he got a different kind of answer. “What are you doing?” he asked. He got this answer: “I’m building a cathedral for the glory of God.”

What a difference in attitude. For the first two men, it was just a job. The third man knew that even his manual labor was his gift to God for all that Christ had done for him. That man was no longer living under the curse of Adam. He had received the blessing of Jesus Christ, who makes all things new.

Work, when it has been redeemed by the cross of Jesus, is a blessing. Work becomes a privilege, to take what God has given you and to use those talents to the best of your ability, giving God praise, even as work. We are to praise God, even in the work that we do.

Not because our work is necessarily fun, or that we're enjoying it all of the time. But in all things we are to give glory to God, even in our work. Brother Lawrence, a monk, talked about practicing the presence of God in whatever he was doing. So he tried to praise God, even when he was doing dishes, or sweeping floors.

How many of us can find that kind of humility, and that kind of servant's heart in all that we do? Too often we mumble and grumble, instead of being thankful for the opportunity to work, in the name of Jesus.

What a difference it might make in our work, if we said a prayer before we began. "Lord, I dedicate all that I do today to your glory and honor. Use my work to honor you." Even if we're not working in a profession that is religious, like being a pastor or a chaplain, we can pray that prayer.

We can have that same attitude, whether we are a computer technician, a teacher, an administrator, an engineer, a nurse, a parent, even a garbage collector. Whatever it is we do, let's do it for God. Then, our very work becomes our sacrifice, our gift to the Lord.

Even if we're retired, we can dedicate the day's tasks and responsibilities to God. The gift of our time and our service can be a blessing to help make our world a better place. Our work is our service, rendered unto God. So, whatever we do, let us do all for the glory of God. Amen? Amen.