

Sermon for September 2, 2018
Labor Day
“The Ministry of Daily Work”

Matthew 5:13-16

90,000 – That’s a big number. I can’t imagine seeing 90,000 of anything. That is how many hours the average person works in their lifetime. If you worked from the time you were 20 until 65, 40 hours a week for 50 weeks of the year you would have worked 90,000 hours. That comes to 3,750 days or a little over 10 years and 3 months.

Day in and day out most of us go to work, even when the economy is bad. Our culture sets aside a day, Labor Day, to celebrate work by taking a day off from labor. A person’s work often is used to define them. When people first meet you they ask, “What do you do?” They are not asking for your hobbies. They are asking what kind of work you do. That is why unemployment can be so psychologically and emotionally devastating.

Since work makes up so much of people’s lives and is so important maybe the church ought to say something about it. Maybe we should start by celebrating what we do for a living. As I list your area or work I want you to stand if able or raise your hand if you can’t stand. I am going to try to cover all the bases with some broad categories of work. If you feel your job fits in one of the categories, please stand when I name that group. Those who are retired stand with the area of work you retired from, and those who are unemployed or in school with the area of work in which you are seeking employment.

If it could be said that you work in the scientific arena, please stand (engineers, chemists, forensic investigators, lab tech). If you would categorize yourself as working with food, please stand (food prep, food sales, cafeteria workers). If you work with plants or farming, please stand (gardeners, plant nursery workers). If you would consider yourself to be working in a helping profession, please stand (medicine, customer service, public safety, childcare, teachers, homemakers, caretakers). If you work with words or writing or music or information, please stand (web design, secretary, admin assistant, writer, musician). If you work for the government, including the armed forces, and have not already stood, please stand. If you work in an area I have not mentioned, please stand.

We have a broad range of arenas and places where we work, and a broad range of people that we meet daily. How does that part of our lives intersect with the Christian part of our lives? One of the realities of Christian living is that being a Christian is a 24/7/365 life. We don’t stop being Christians when we leave for work in the morning, or at least we shouldn’t. So how do we live the Christian life in the workplace? In some professions, especially helping professions – doctors, nurses, teachers, social workers, etc., it is easy to see, but what about the rest of us?

I believe Jesus’ Sermon of the Mount speaks to this. Jesus said, “You are the salt of the earth.” The job of salt is to season and preserve. In Jesus’ they didn’t have refrigeration, so salt was used to preserve foods. Salt would not just add flavor, but it would kill germs and prevent food from going bad.

The role of the Christian in society is to preserve, sanitize, and add flavor. We are called to bring the good news of Jesus to the world so that people can gain eternal life, and we are called to share the joy and love of God; to spice up people's lives. When you go to work, even if you are in a cubical farm, you meet people. You can be a positive influence in their lives. I am not saying you need to corner your coworkers and beat them with a Bible, but you can be a good neighbor to them in the office and to the clients that come into your workplace.

Another thing Jesus says here is "You are the light of the world." There is another place where Jesus says, "I am the light of the world." (John 8:12) I guess you could say that Jesus is the light and we are like little mirrors reflecting that light. Or rather Jesus is the source of the light that we shine through our lives. Now a light that is kept under a basket is useless. You can't see anything with it. So as Christians we are to shine the light of Christ so that all can see.

Sometimes this can be difficult in the work place. But the thing about light is it is honest and pure. Just be yourself, and the light of God's love will shine through you. Pray for your coworkers. You spend a third of your life with these people, get to know them and their needs and pray for them. The same with your clients.

I know this may be like the fish trying to teach the frog how to breathe; what the fish knows really doesn't apply to the frog's situation. As a preacher I can get away with a lot. People don't mind if I say, "Let's pray about that" on the spot; in fact, they often expect it. But just by being yourself in the workplace, you can shine the light of Christ through small acts of love and kindness. People will recognize that, and it will open opportunities reach out in deeper ways.

If you notice on the bulletins I am listed as the pastor of this church, but the members are the ministers. We have a doctrine in the church called the "Priesthood of all Believers." Basically, we are all representatives of Jesus Christ in the world. Another way of saying this is that all Christians are "little Christs." We represent Jesus and serve as his body in this world. No matter where you are, you can be a little Christ. And what better place to be a little Christ than where you spend almost half your waking hours, at work!

God chose you in Christ and redeemed you through Jesus' blood to be salt and light for a dark and flavorless world. You don't stop being a Christians just because you put on your work clothes and head to the work. God is at work in this world redeeming it one soul at a time. God is renovating the universe one life at a time. You are on the front lines of that redemptive work.

So, take the day off tomorrow, if you can, and enjoy yourself. But on Tuesday morning go to work, or wherever you go, including the unemployment office. Remember to take your salt and light. And go to play your part in redeeming the world as you serve God in your workplace!