

Sept 3 – Worker is Worthy of His Wages Luke 10:1-12

Labor Day – What comes to mind? End of summer activities? Beginning of public schools, colleges, universities? Labor unions and organizations? The American worker? Your own work? Our opportunity to perform productive activity?

In our morning scripture, Luke 10:1-12, Jesus gave his disciples and followers work to do. He sent them out in twos to precede him as he traveled through the area teaching. This summer I have had three people knock on my door to tell me about various issues and concerns. Perhaps Jesus' followers were the door-to-door visitors of his time. But unlike the young people who came to my house, Jesus didn't pay wages to his followers to go. We read he told them to go without carrying a purse or beggar's bag or even an extra pair of sandals. They were on their own, or so it seemed.

If you had been one of these followers, what would your reaction have been? "Wait, I'm not being paid?" "I'm not to take any money or provisions? What will I eat? Where will I stay? What if the strap on my sandal breaks—will I have to go barefoot?"

When it comes to work, do we usually want to know what we're going to get out of it? Do we see work as a curse—something we *have* to do—or as a blessing—something we *get* to do?

A Curse or A Privilege?

The idea of **curse** most likely comes from Genesis 3:17 – “And to the man he said, ‘Because you have listened to the voice of your wife, and have eaten of the tree about which I commanded you, ‘You shall not eat of it,’ cursed is the ground because of you; in toil you shall eat of it all the days of your life⁽¹⁸⁾ thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you; and you shall eat the plants of the field....⁽²³⁾ therefore the Lord God sent him forth from the garden of Eden, to till the ground from which he was taken.” When Adam and Eve ate fruit from the tree of knowledge of good and evil, which they had been prohibited to eat, God told them they would toil till ground full of thorns and thistles. Hard work!

But perhaps God gave us the privilege of work: work is a *blessing, a privilege*

- ◆ God created us to be special: Genesis 1:26
“Then God said, ‘ Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness;”
This is echoed in Psalm 8:5 –we are created “a little lower” than divine beings
- ◆ God entrusted us with God’s creation:
Genesis 1:27 “and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over the wild animals of the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth.”
Again, we find echoes of this in Psalm 8:4-6
“...what are human beings that you are mindful of them, mortals that you care for them? Yet you have made them a littler lower than God, and crowned them with glory and honor. You have given them dominion over the works of your hands; you have put all things under their feet”
Made in God’s image, a little lower than divine beings, we are given responsibility to care for God’s creation.

And then we return to Genesis 2:15, a verse to which I had never given much thought. “The Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to till (cultivate) it and keep it.” God entrusted Adam and Eve to work in the Garden of Eden, caring for this beautiful, perfect garden. The Hebrew word we translate “till” means “serve.” We are caretakers, stewards of creation.

We humans each need to have productive activity to do. We need a purpose to our lives for it is through that productive activity that we feel we are of value. God has extended to us the privilege of serving Him

If then work is a blessing to us, a privilege, we need to address a couple of questions.

- ◆ First, where are we sent to do God’s work?
--Luke 10:1 tells us Jesus’ followers were to go to the places where Jesus intended to go, to teach
--Later, Jesus tells his followers this means they are to go into all the world Matthew 28:19-20 – go to all nations, making disciples and teaching them all they have heard
--And not too long after that, in Acts 1:8, Jesus says “through

the power of the Holy Spirit, you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and to the ends of the earth
And we do go wherever God is

- Some of us respond to God's call to be missionaries to other countries
Jeni Pedzinski – Thailand; Jon/Amanda Good – Hungary; Pieter/Nora Kalkman – Eastern Europe are three missionaries/missionary couples who have responded
- Some of us respond to God's call to do mission work full-time in the US
Cathy Maher directs Friendship House, Detroit, meeting the needs of people in that neighborhood
Rev. Kimberly LaPlante pastors Church of Hope located in the South Dakota Women's Prison in Pierre SD
- Some of us respond to God's call to volunteer for short-term mission trips. As American Baptists we are sending teams to
 - New Orleans to continue rebuilding efforts there. This is our 12th annual trip.
 - West Virginia for rebuilding after massive flooding and New Jersey for rebuilding after Hurricane Sandy
 - Murrow Children's Home, Muskogee
 - Sturgis SD for the Sturgis Bike (Motocycle) Rally to staff American Baptist Emergency Services
 - ABC-MI mission trips to work in Haiti
- Most of us respond by being God's witness right where we work and live. We are to do God's work—care for God's creation, each day even right where we are.

◆ Second, what kind of work are we to be doing? Let's go back to Luke 10:1-2

- Jesus appointed 70 (72), sending them ahead of where he planned to be going. He tells them there is much work to do: "The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore ask the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest."

We are to be doing God's work – telling of God's love, showing God's love through the way we live so those who aren't in relationship with God, those who don't know God's love can see that love

- We are to "cure the sick (bring God's healing), and say, 'The kingdom of God has come near to you.'" Luke 10:9
Our workplaces, our neighborhoods can be God's sacred space
 - "Jerry," who owns his own business, seeks potential when hiring a new employee and then mentors that staff person to develop skills and experience
 - My daughter often expresses her frustration about her work at a private liberal arts college. This past week, as I prepared this message, I texted her to think of her work as ministry. The reminder was helpful to her.
- ◆ Third, what happens with our work conditions change? Our work conditions will change but our WORK—sharing God's love--remains the same
 - External changes occur in the circumstances in which we work and the resources which we use in our work.
The recent movie *Hidden Figures* tells the stories of three African-American women who made significant contributions to NASA's efforts to put an astronaut into space. One group of African-American women started making the necessary computations with pencil and paper. Then computations were done with a very large "adding-machine"- looking piece of equipment. Then NASA purchased a computer, which took up an entire room! Compare room-sized computers with what we use today—such as laptop computers which probably have more computer power than the initial humongous computers!
 - As external work conditions change, we face personal changes
 - In the US, our work is often our identity“ Our work is the expression of who we understand ourselves to be. As we meet and get acquainted with others, one of the most frequent questions asked is "What do you do?" Work is how we describe ourselves to others. Work is how others understand us.
 - When we "retire," we don't just give up paid employment, we struggle to find purpose in each day. Sadly, a small number do not find life meaningful. Wally had worked at the same company most of his working life. When he reached that magical retirement age of 65,

he was forced to retire. Without his job, Wally had no direction, no meaning. Within six months of retirement, Wally took his own life. Work often becomes our identity

- Fortunately, for some of us who equate work, paid or volunteer, with a meaningful life, there are opportunities to take us out of our homes each day, no matter what our age

We have been entrusted to care for God's creation—people as well as nature. And wherever we go, whatever work we do, we can trust that God provides for us.

- Returning to Luke 10:4 where Jesus instructs his followers, "Carry no purse, no bag, no sandals; and greet no one on the road." They weren't to take provisions and they weren't to ask anyone along the way for provisions.
- Yet, the followers would be cared for. In Luke 10:7-8 Jesus tells the followers to bless the town, the house where they arrive. If that blessing (Peace be to you) is returned, if hospitality is offered, they are to "remain in the same house, eating and drinking whatever they provide, for the laborer deserves to be paid. Do not move about from house to house. Whenever you enter a town and its people welcome you, eat what is set before you
- We don't worry, we trust God for provision

We are to go into the world—that is, go anywhere and everywhere--telling of God's love, living lives that show God's love for us, for all

- We may go as volunteers or as paid employees.
- We may work in religious settings or in secular settings
There is no such thing as non-church work. That is, all the work a follower of Christ does is religious work. It is all ministry.

We are reminded that we are to work, both in the Old Testament and in the New Testament

- Ecclesiastes 9:10 "Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with all your might, for there is no activity or planning or knowledge or wisdom in Sheol, in the grave, where you are going." Work now for when you die you won't have opportunity to work.
- I prefer Paul's words found in Colossians 3:23-24

²³"Whatever your hand finds to do, whatever your task, do it with all your heart, as working for the Lord
²⁴knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance. It is the Lord Christ whom you serve.

On this Labor Day weekend, we are reminded the worker is indeed worthy of his wages. We are working for Christ and we have the promise we will receive pay, the reward for our work. Our reward may not be dollars and cents now but we will be given a reward, eternal life.

Is our work a curse—something we have to do, we are expected to do because Adam and Eve sinned in the Garden of Eden—or is our work, our productive activity, a privilege and blessing. I would suggest the answer is found in Colossians 3:24: "It is the Lord Christ whom we serve." Whether we're doing something in the "Christian" or religious realm or we're doing something in the "secular" realm—out there, each work day-- we are working for the Lord

May God bless our activity, our work, as we share God's love for all.