

SANCTIFIED WORK

(John 6: 28-29; John 9: 1-4)

Most of North America is celebrating this weekend the holiday we know as Labor Day, a day which has been a federal holiday since the late 1800's in this country. Labor Day is a yearly celebration of the contributions workers and labor unions have made to the strength, prosperity, laws, and well-being of our country.

Though Labor Day is traditionally celebrated on the first Monday of September, I remember one year in my life celebrating Labor Day a little early—like toward the end of July—by taking some time AWAY from the job I had at the time, which was pastoring The Church of the Holy Redeemer in Brooklyn, NY. I remember that trip so vividly because it had been awhile since I had driven across the country, and I enjoyed that particular trip more than the first two I had taken. I was traveling alone this time, and was free to take my time and take in the picturesque scenery that you can behold as you drive across this

beautiful country. Driving west from New York City through Pennsylvania and Ohio, and further west through states like Colorado and South Dakota, I was able to see some things that I couldn't see in Brooklyn! I could see the colors and textures and splendor of God's handiwork and purposes from a different perspective; and as God's canvas of beauty and majesty kept unfolding right before my very eyes, I was moved to just keep saying to myself, "*Didn't God make a world?*"

Seeing another side of God's creation is like seeing another side of God. It's like being able to see God *outside of the boxes* we inadvertently place God in in our daily lives—like *only on Sunday* boxes; or *only before meals* boxes; or *only in church* boxes; or *only when we need or want something* boxes; or *only in the things we consider sacred* boxes.

One of the things we have been exposed to from our learning of African-centered spiritual traditions and beliefs is that EVERYTHING AND EVERYONE is sacred, because EVERYTHING AND EVERYONE is a manifestation of the Divine! God MADE everything, and God is IN

everything—the mountains, rivers and canyons, as well as the birds, the bees and the trees!

II.

Seeing another side of God's creation can also help us to see better how WE fit into THIS portion of God's creation; meaning our daily lives in this ever-booming metropolis called Madison—which, unfortunately, tend to center around our gainful employment, better known as our jobs, our J-O-B's

Let's face it: in this capitalist society in which we live, you're either *holding on* to a job, are *losing* a job, are *looking for* a job, are *retired from* a job, are *changing jobs*, are *dependent on somebody who has a* job, or are trying to *dodge questions* as to why you *don't* have a job.

And I'm talking to young people also when I say YOU TOO are trying to hold on to a job. Because YOUR J-O-B is going to school! And I know you won't understand this until you are out there working for money, but going to school is the *best job you'll ever have*!

In the kind of society we live in, it's all about a job, being gainfully employed, because somehow, you've got to stay in the game! We have to work out a source of income for ourselves, because this is a consumer society. So, as the bumper sticker says: *I owe, I owe, so off to work I go!*"

But it's important to note that according to some recent statistics, *close to 90% of American workers hate their jobs*. We hate our jobs so much that some recent statistics also show that the highest incidence of heart attacks take place on Monday mornings between 8-9 a.m., when—according to one scenario—after a relaxing weekend, most workers are joylessly returning to the jobs they hate so much. Most of us are not lucky enough to get paid for what we love to do so much that we would even do it for free—like a Michael Jordan with basketball, or a Bill Clinton with politics.

III.

But that does bring to mind the distinction I believe there is between a job and a vocation. Though in actuality they do not always HAVE to be different from one another—as in the case of Mike or Bill—but by definition they ARE different.

A job is something that we do to achieve a source of income. It is a means to an end. We do not have to be suited for it; we don't even have to *like* it. We just need to show up and do it, so we can receive the benefits.

On the other hand, the word vocation is from the Latin word *vocare*—which means “calling.” A vocation is a *calling*. It is an occupation for which one is particularly suited. It is something that we *enjoy*, something that is at the *heart* of us, something that makes us *tick*, something for which we are *gifted*; something that we would do for free—if we didn't have to have a job.

Well, on this Labor Day weekend, I submit to you this morning that a believer in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior has at least two vocations, two callings in life. One (or more) are things they are suited or gifted for. Some people, for example, have gifts dealing with other people, or with computers and technology, or with words, or with building things, or with planning or organizing things, or with music, etc. But I want to remind us today that each believer in Christ Jesus also has the *vocation*, the *calling*, and has even *been given a gift*—to glorify God!

✚ The scriptures say to those who believe, *“O give thanks unto the Lord; for the Lord’s mercy endures forever.”*

✚ The believer says to those who believe, *“O magnify the Lord with me, and let us exalt God’s name together.”*

✚ The psalm-writer says to those who believe, *“Let everything that has breath praise the Lord!”*

✚ Jesus says in Mark’s gospel that only those who glorify God are his *true* brothers and sisters.

✚ And for the “good Lutherans” in the house, Martin Luther says in the Small Catechism: “*What is the chief end of man? Man’s chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy Him forever.*” (Please note that the sexist language is his, not mine.)

Which means—in a manner of speaking, and with special sensitivity for those who may be having “I don’t have a job” issues at the moment—it doesn’t matter whether you have a job in the secular world or not. If you are a believer in Christ Jesus, then *you work for God*, and you are always gainfully employed in God’s kingdom. Your job AS WELL AS your vocation in the kingdom of God, is to give God glory, praise and honor in all the things we do! This is what I call “*sanctified work*,” and in the kingdom of God, there is always some *sanctified work to do*.

IV.

“What’s sanctified work, Preacher?” I am glad you asked me that!

Sanctified work is work that is going to cause our growth in our relationship with God—which is the most important relationship we as believers have in this life. *Sanctified work* is what Jesus talks about in John 6. When asked what we must do to perform the works of God—sanctified work—Jesus answered *“This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom God has sent,”* and that you work with him to work the works of God.

✚ In John 9 Jesus says *“WE must work the works of the God who sent me while it is day . . .”*

✚ In John 15 Jesus says *“I am the vine, you are the branches. Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit, because apart from me you can do nothing.”*

What is sanctified work?

Sanctified work is believing in the Jesus whom God has sent into the midst of the world to change the world.

Sanctified work is holding on to the belief that the activity of Christ *in* the world continues to *change* the world.

Sanctified work is believing that through the activity of Jesus in the world:

- Sad hearts can STILL become glad hearts;
- Blind eyes can STILL become seeing eyes;
- Lame people can STILL become walking people;
- Old things can STILL be made new;
- Stones can STILL be rolled away from in front of our tombs;
- Resurrection is STILL a possibility;
- And love can STILL make the world go round

Sanctified work is believing that for Christ's activity to bear fruit in your corner of the world, you have to work with him to make it happen.

I know good Lutherans bend over backward trying not to say we have to do some work when it comes to our belief. But let me remind you on this Labor Day that in God's scenario for the story of salvation, Jesus Christ plays the *starring role*, but *featured in the drama* are you and me and every person ever baptized into Christ Jesus. Each movement in the drama of salvation features two irreplaceable characters: YOU and JESUS, *laboring together, working together*, doing the sanctified work of the kingdom of God together. Because apart from Jesus, we can do nothing! But with him—and only with him—can we work the works of the God who sent him.

Let me tell you one last thing about sanctified work:

Sanctified work starts with prayer. Prayer is like “punching in” on the job. The most important part of sanctified work is *prayer work*.

Because it is in prayer that we discern the work that we are supposed

to do. And in sanctified work, “unless you’re in prayer, you’re not really there!”

Through that prayer work, we are given *power*—and we know that no work can be done without power! Prayer leads to power, because prayer connects us to the most powerful Power Source there is— Ultimate Power; Awesome Power; Wonder-Working Power. Paul even says the “incredible power that raised Jesus from the dead, and that is now made available to US.”

And, finally, through that incredible, wonder-working power, we can end our day with *peace*. We have peace because of the saving work that God did, reconciling all things to Godself by making peace with the world and everything and everyone in the world through the redeeming blood of the cross.

We can have peace, Beloved, because God has already taken care of things, and won the victory over sin and death for us! We can work the sanctified work of God, with Jesus as our Lord and partner in that work.

And as we continue to abide in that partnership, we can receive the abundant life that Jesus wants us to have, and all the benefits that that life contains.

I don't know about you, but to me, that sounds like some good news!

Amen.

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