

September 3, 2017

Labor Day 2017

Get a Job!

Ecclesiastes 5:18-20

Opening words: The history of Labor Day can be traced back to 1882. Matthew Maguire, a machinist, suggested the holiday while he was serving as the secretary of the Central Labor Union of New York. It must have been a good idea. Oregon made it a state holiday in 1887. Thanks to the efforts of President Grover Cleveland, it became a national holiday in 1894. Labor Day is not just about mourning the end of summer. Labor Day is important because it celebrates the value of work. The church sign says it best, *Without Labor Nothing Prospers*. Not every job is glamorous and well-paying, but every job is important. Did you know, on this Labor Day weekend, 14% of our country is either looking for work or has given up looking for a job? I have no clue how many Americans are underemployed. In other words, they are frustrated because they feel overqualified for their job. We need to pray for these people.

This is the best job I have ever had. The worst job I ever had was between my freshman and sophomore years of college. That year, summer jobs were scarce. The only job I could find was running a street cleaner at the Eastwood Mall. That job was both lonely and dirty. I worked Monday thru Friday nights from 11:00 pm until 7:00 am. There is no other way to say it. I hated that job. That street cleaner never worked right. Most of the time, it wouldn't start. That year, I was glad to see Labor Day come because I could quit my horrible job and go back to school. On days I am the most frustrated here, I remember my days running that street cleaner at the Eastwood Mall in the middle of the night. Suddenly, my frustrating days here look a whole lot better. The challenge for us today is to view our jobs as a blessing. Our scripture lesson for today is Ecclesiastes 5:18-20. I have called this message *Get a Job!*

Ecclesiastes 5:18-20 This is what I have observed to be good: that it is appropriate for a person to eat, to drink and to find satisfaction in their toilsome labor under the sun during the few days of life God has given them—for this is their lot. ¹⁹ Moreover, when God gives someone wealth and possessions, and the ability to enjoy them, to accept their lot and be happy in their toil—this is a gift of God. ²⁰ They seldom reflect on the days of their life, because God keeps them occupied with gladness of heart.

Colin Powell once said, *"There is no secret to success. It is the result of preparation, hard work and learning from failure."* That quote must have come from personal experience. I believe the retired general is right. If you think he is right, say, **"Amen!"**

Did you know, according to CBS News, there are approximately 100 million full-time employees in the United States? Fifty-one percent of American workers feel somewhat

disengaged at work, meaning they feel no real connection with their job, so they do the minimum amount of work required. Another 16% feel actively disengaged at their jobs. In other words, 16% truly hate their jobs. That explains why the new American dream is winning the lottery so they can quit their jobs. Mavis Wanczyk is living the new American dream. Recently, she won the \$758.8 million Powerball. She announced to the world at her press conference, she was going to quit her job. She had worked at her local hospital for 32 years. If you won the lottery, would you quit your job? This is the question:

Do you know anyone who hates their job? You must know someone. Sixty-seven percent of Americans are not thrilled with their jobs. According to a website called Salary.com, here are the signs of someone who hates their job:

1. They have a bad attitude toward work
2. They are only motivated by money
3. They dream of quitting their jobs
4. They only do what is required at work
5. They feel overworked and underappreciated at work
6. They lack any commitment to their employer
7. They lack fulfillment at work
8. They hope their children take another career path
9. They take no pride in their work
10. They are bored and unchallenged

I feel bad for people who hate their jobs. Something in their lives has gone horribly wrong. If you know someone who hates their job, say, "**Amen!**" Today's scripture lesson reminds us that our jobs are not a curse. Through the eyes of God, our jobs are a blessing. Let us look at the text together.

We find ourselves today in the Old Testament. To be more exact, we find ourselves in the book of Ecclesiastes. This piece of literature is found with the other pieces of Biblical wisdom literature: Job, Psalms, Proverbs and the Song of Songs. Tradition tells us Ecclesiastes was written by Solomon, the wisest man in the Bible. He lived about 950 years before the birth of Christ. Ecclesiastes can be broken down into seven distinct sections. Our reading came from the fourth section. Solomon wants to remind us that life, itself, is a gift from God. The secret to enjoying life is keeping your eyes fixed on God. A life that is blind to God is lived out of balance. That is a great piece of wisdom we often forget. God knows what we often forget: work is more than a way to pay your bills.

Have you ever stopped to consider the fact that all the Biblical characters had an occupation? Did you know there are 5433 different occupations found in the Bible? There were builders, embroiders, weavers, stonemasons, tanners, blacksmiths, merchants, soldiers, fishermen, musicians, priests, shepherds, farmers and doctors, just to name a few. There were even lawyers. Each one of those occupations was not seen

as a curse. Each one was a blessing. Can I ask you a question? Do you see your job as a blessing or a curse?

Years ago, I was called by a local funeral home. A man had died who was unchurched. As is my custom, I went to the funeral home the night before the service to meet the family. Everyone in the family was nice to me. The deceased's brother took the lead. He began to tell me his brother's story. He told me about their parents and their childhood home. He told me about his brother's education and his job. He told me about his priorities and his hobbies. He told me everything, except what he had done in retirement. He had been retired over twenty-five years. He didn't say a word about his brother's retirement years, so I asked, "What did your brother do in retirement?" The man's expression completely changed. He said, "Well, on the first day of retirement, he slept in, turned on the television and opened a beer. He did that every day for the rest of his life. We didn't see him much and no one cared." According to the deceased man's brother, retirement was a curse. According to God, work is a blessing.

Consider these four things with me:

1. **Your job keeps you busy and challenges you to do more.** How long can you sit there and do nothing? Life is short. Do something!
2. **Your job gives you a sense of pride and identity.** It is hard to be proud of yourself when you are doing nothing. It is hard for your loved ones to be proud of you when you have done nothing.
3. **Your job improves your social life.** How many friends have you made at work?
4. **Your job provides for your family.** How many bills could you pay if you had no income?

Let me ask you the question one more time: Do you see your job as a blessing or a curse?

Over the years, the constant question people have asked me has changed. When I was younger, people asked me, "When are you going to move?" In the world of United Methodism, you are encouraged to move and you are discouraged to stay in one place too long. Those words fell on my deaf ears. Someone told me once I had committed professional suicide by staying here so long. That was fine with me because I have never considered the ministry a career. It is a calling. I stay here still for one reason. I am not always sure why, but God wants me to be here. The question used to be, when are you going to move? The question has changed. This is my new constant question:

When are you going to retire? It is a good question. It is a fair question. I have asked myself that question. Earlier this summer, I celebrated my thirtieth year in the United Methodist pension program. I can't believe thirty years has gone by so fast. I will be honest with you. I did think about it. I'll give you three reasons why. First, I have the

years in to retire and I have saved a few dollars along the way. I haven't saved that money to not spend it. Second, I am sixty years old and I am starting to feel like a dinosaur. I am having a hard time relating to my colleagues and church work has changed. Third, my sister's death changed the way I look at my life. Talking about cancer daily has changed the way I look at my life. Life is short and someday I would like a real weekend. I would like a real Saturday night, when I don't have to go to bed early so I am rested for Sunday morning.

Over a year ago, I went to one of those retirement workshops. I went not because I am going to retire, but I went to learn about my pension. I want to make a wise choice when the time comes. There was a moment in the workshop when I had the opportunity to sit one-on-one with the presenter. She is a woman I do not know well, but I respect her work. She is the one who gave me the best advice so far. She drew near to me and asked me three questions. She asked, "Russ, do you consider yourself healthy?" I said, "Yes!" Second, she asked, "Do you consider your wife healthy?" I said, "Yes!" Finally, she asked me, "Do you enjoy your job?" I said, "Yes!" Then, she said, "Russ, why would you retire? When one of those three things changes, retire. On the day your health grows bad, retire. On the day your wife's health grows bad, retire. On the day your job stops being rewarding and starts being frustrating, retire. If you are healthy, your wife is healthy and your job is rewarding, keep working. Retirement leaves you a lot of empty days to fill. Retirement isn't about what you get, it is about what you are giving up." Her words changed the way I look at my job. Did you know our understanding of retirement isn't found in the Bible? I left that workshop seeing my job differently. I left feeling blessed because I had a job. And if you have a job you enjoy, you are blessed too.

The time has come to stop looking at our jobs as a curse and start looking at our jobs as a blessing. Do you remember the words of Colin Powell? He once said, "*There is no secret to success. It is the result of preparation, hard work and learning from failure.*" And all of God's people said, "**Amen!**"