

## “Work and Worship”

August 31, 2014

Labor Day Weekend – Spiritual Gifts Series

I grew up on a dairy farm. I was the youngest of three daughters, so my responsibilities paled in comparison to what others were doing on the farm. I watched my parents and sisters and other help milk cows, bail hay, clean stalls, and all the rest that goes into making a family farm run well. It was hard work, good work, rewarding work, and blessed work. I witnessed my parents' faith in how they treated us, those who worked for us, other neighbors and farmers, and all of the people they interacted with.

Whatever kind of work we do – at home, on a farm, in a factory, at a restaurant, in a school, over the phone, God uses us. I don't think many of us think of it that way. Our lives are so segmented sometimes. We separate our lives into compartments: home, work, church, friends, and whatever else. And we forget that God calls us to let our faith touch all of our lives – not just the time we spend in church on Sunday morning, but also those times when we we're working.

Thomas More, who lived in the 16<sup>th</sup> century said, “The things, good Lord, that we pray for, give us grace to labor for.” His statement calls us to put our faith into action – going beyond what we pray for and doing what we can to make it happen. It means showing our faith in Jesus outwardly in all areas of our lives. Kimberly, the woman we met in the video, is a great example. Her perspective on her work is powerful - to understand that God has a purpose beyond just what we're doing, to build authentic relationships with others, and to know that we can bring glory to God as we work.

Labor Day is tomorrow. A day off for many people – the last time to BBQ or go to the beach. But back in 1882 when it came to be, Labor Day was a protest against working conditions. Labor Day grew out of a need for justice for people, and still, we pray for those who struggle. It's a good reminder for us that there is value in our work. God calls us to use our

physical and intellectual gifts to benefit our lives and our families – and to make our society a better place to live.

Labor Day reminds us of our call to faithful stewardship – how we manage all that God has given to us. Work gives us the opportunity to respond to God’s gifts in our lives – we have the responsibility to glorify God with our work. Work reminds us that our time, our gifts, and our resources have value – that we make a difference when we manage them faithfully. Perhaps most importantly, work is one more part of life where we can witness to God’s grace in our lives through Jesus Christ. Sometimes it means offering a word of encouragement or prayer for someone. Sometimes it means not participating in the jokes or activities that don’t honor others or glorify God.

The passage from First Peter is the last one in our series of spiritual gifts. Part of the writer’s goal is to remind his hearers of the need for community especially as they wait for the “end” - for Christ’s return. They lived with a perspective that Jesus was coming again, and it was going to be soon! Their sense of time was different than yours and mine. We don’t pay much attention to when Jesus will come again. We know he will, but our perspective is not so immediate.

And yet, that’s a part of the challenge of living our faith. What if we did live with a more immediate sense of Christ’s coming again? Would it change how we lived? How we worked? How we interacted?

I was struck by one of our campus ministers at Annual Conference this year. He mentioned that the work he’s engaged in many times is to help students connect the faith they profess with their chosen profession. That’s for all of us - to realize that our faith matters as we live everyday. For the one-third of life that we spend at work, God uses it to God’s glory and honor and praise. Kimberly is clear about her calling, and she’s clear that her work as a contractor is just as important as anyone who works in the church or anywhere else.

And it’s clear in First Peter that faith requires community. Work and worship go together as we seek to live for God in our daily lives. And hospitality is a vital part of that. Notice what it says, “Be hospitable to one

another *without complaining.*” Let me read that again. “Be hospitable to one another *without complaining.*” Verse 10 goes on, “Like good stewards of the manifold grace of God, serve one another with whatever gift each of you has received.” We have to wonder why the writer encourages the people not to complain about showing hospitality—maybe because it’s so easy to do. Obviously, hospitality was crucial to their ministry, just as it is to ours. Jesus demonstrates hospitality. He is the reason that we’re called to welcome people and be gracious with one another. Through his ministry and his teaching, Jesus welcomes people—all people.

Even if you’re retired from a career, there’s no retirement from being a follower of Jesus. There’s no retirement from using your spiritual gifts to glorify God. There’s no retirement from building the Kingdom of God right now.

Who knows how the Holy Spirit might move in your workplace or in your social circles if you shared your faith with someone who needed a word of hope and encouragement? Who knows how your faith could impact someone else? We use our spiritual gifts to serve one another in love – and to serve the world God loves.

I pray that our work and worship would go together - that when people see us they would know that Jesus is our Rock and Redeemer - that our trust is not in ourselves, but in God - that we allow the Holy Spirit to guide us - and that ultimately, God gets the glory.

And remember Thomas More’s words: “The things, good Lord, that we pray for, give us grace to labor for.”

Thanks be to God. AMEN!

GO INTO LITANY

*Perhaps God is speaking to you today – the Holy Spirit is moving in you in a mighty way and encouraging you to use the gifts that God has given you. Perhaps God is calling you to make a commitment to a life with Jesus.*