

The Rev. Emily Dunevant

Luke 21:5-19  
Malachi 4:1-2a  
Psalm 98  
2 Thes. 3:6-13

November 13, 2022  
The Twenty-third Sunday after Pentecost

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The other day I saw the best Meme on Instagram. It had two pictures. The first was of a person with the covers pulled up around them and a pillow over their eyes. The caption read, "God, give me a reason to go to work." The second picture was of Jesus with his arms outstretched as he said, "Horses aren't cheap my child."

I immediately sent it to Dwayne.

Although it was one of those things that makes you laugh, it had a much deeper message that we should consider. The message isn't about the importance of supporting your favorite hobby but about the importance of work as a responsibility to something greater than ourselves. It asks...why do we work and for whom do we work.

To be sure any time we talk about work or money, we are going to be dancing around some really strong and personal feelings. Not only do we understand the value of work differently from generation to generation but we also have different values around how we use our money. And, we all have different experiences of the abundance or lack thereof of financial resources and so the question of work can be highly charged.

And so, I don't want to approach this topic with generalizations or assumptions about how each of you may understand the value of work and money. But I do want to ask that we keep an open mind to what Paul and Jesus are trying to teach.

Let's start with Paul. In our Epistle this morning from Paul's letter to the church in Thessalonika, we find ourselves presented with folks not wanting to get out of bed. They are lazy and have become complacent about the value of work. Paul speaks of their idleness, their disorderly and irresponsible conduct. His exact words are, "For we hear that some of you are living in idleness, mere busybodies, not doing any work."

It's important to note that the people in Thessalonika aren't people who are unable to work. They simply don't want to work. Their hearts are not motivated. Doing what God calls them to do...to live a life of righteousness and goodness is simply too much to ask. They are a drain on their community.

Their idleness means that they expected other folks to use their time and resources to do the work of caring for the sick, of welcoming the stranger, of supporting the poor. Paul was none to pleased.

For Paul, everyone, no matter who you are, is called by God to help the community, to be a part of the greater good, to be an active, engaged participant in the creation of a loving, life-giving, community of faith. It is everyone's responsibility.

And that alone is why you work. You work with your heart turned toward God so that you can be a contributing member of your community.

The lazy Thessalonians didn't care about community. They only cared about their own comfort and ease.

Let me ask you this...Do we believe that putting Christ at the center of our lives matters? Do we believe that following Christ actually means striving to live like Christ? In other words, where is your heart centered?

Because when our hearts are truly centered on God our work becomes not a self-centered pursuit for our own security. It becomes the way we can more fully utilize our hands and our minds to spread God's love out into the world.

Sounds good, doesn't it? But what if you are living through a time of deep scarcity? How do you understand Paul's teaching then? Maybe you have lost a job, maybe you have experienced a severe illness, maybe you have to replace your washing machine and are already too far in debt. How can you contribute to the greater good in times like these?

Living from a place of scarcity makes us extremely fearful and protective of the resources we are able to achieve. Scarcity turns us inward. That's understandable. It might not matter how convicted you are to live like Christ if you can't put food on the table.

Or, on the other hand, maybe you are living in abundance and have the perspective that what is yours is yours. You've worked hard and other people should to. It's America, after all. We all have opportunity. Don't we?

Both of these perspectives...that of scarcity and that of closed off abundance have one thing in common. They are both driven by fear...fear of losing what you have earned. Fear of the other, the person who might misuse your hard-earned resources. Fear of making it just one more day, of paying the bills, of taking care of your children.

Most of us have experienced that kind of fear in one way or another if we are honest. Here's the thing...work alone doesn't cure our fears. Money doesn't answer all our needs.

In our Gospel, Jesus reminds us that we will absolutely face times of scarcity and fear. The walls of our beloved security will fall in all around us. Life doesn't promise us ease. But, Jesus wants us to rise above our own personal fears and excuses to look around and see where we can do some good. No matter our personal circumstances. He reminds us to not close ourselves off

from the rest of the world just because life is difficult. It's in those difficult moments that Jesus wants us to turn toward our faith and turn toward one another.

That's the work ethic Paul is getting at. Work that puts God at the center. Work that puts something greater than ourselves at the core of who we are. And sometimes that may be through our financial resources. Work can provide the kind of abundance that we are able to share. Other times it may be through the skills we have gained through our work. Maybe you work in construction and can help someone repair their home. Maybe you are a teacher and can tutor a teenager in math. Or maybe you simply met someone at work who inspired you to get involved with in a cause you care for.

We are called to work because we are called to do good. And when our work honors God, we are able to serve our community from a place of joy, not a place of fear, sharing what we have and loving one another as Christ loved us. As Paul reminds us, "Brothers and sisters, do not be weary in doing what is right." Amen.