

Introduction: Why work matters

This is the last week in a series of sermons on Calling. There is a **primary** calling that is shared by all Christian at all times in history (like those who gave us this building 50 years ago). We are to be disciples who make disciples wherever we are. That is our core mission as Christians. Who are we called o BE: Who am I called to be? What am I called to DO? Where am I called to GO?

We are busy answering the third question: Where should I GO to be most effective for God. Answer: for the most part GO NOWHERE. Because you are already where God wants you to be! Where am I meant to be a disciple who makes disciples? Right where you are! If anything you need to GO wherever you normally GO with the intentionality of a Chaplain. What did you write on your Chaplain's business card? Gospel opportunity

Read Genesis 1:26-28, 2:8-9, 15

1. Work is good (creation)

In most of the creation narratives of the near Middle Eastern people work is seen as a necessary evil. In the Mesopotamian myth about the creation of the world, the gods create the world only to realise that the world is going to require up keep. So the Chief god Marduk says:

I will produce a lowly Primitive;
'Man' shall be his name.
I will create a Primitive Worker;
He will be charged with the service of the gods,
that they might have their ease."¹

In their story work is not something that the gods do – it is too common and offensive.

Some of this kind of view of the common and undesirable nature of work still exists in our Christian thinking. For example, some people think: in church I am doing God's work but in my job I am just earning money to support myself and my family (and maybe other people too – like missionaries) so that I can do things that God really values. The result of this kind of thinking is that you completely separate your work from your faith. *Work is secular and mostly filled with evil people who do evil things and if I could just escape to spiritual ministry in the church...* Work is a necessary evil! It stems from the same place as the thinking that says: "All we are waiting for is Christ return so that we can escape this evil world" – but that gives no credence to the beauty and value of creation.

¹ <http://www.newagegod.com/ENKImedia/earth7.htm>

Another way is, “if only all people in my workplace were Christians then we could reform this company and we will enjoy God’s every blessing. The first view is “I can’t wait to get to heaven”; the second is “Heaven must come to earth”. Well, you obviously haven’t met some of the Christian that I know! What I am saying is: that won’t solve the problem because you’re never going to get heaven on earth until Christ returns.

Also, when I am a passenger in a plane landing at CT International Airport in the middle of a wild storm I don’t need a Christian pilot, I want the most skilful pilot. The unhelpful narrative behind this is: the best doctor or teacher or hairdresser is the Christian one. It is not true and it undermines the appreciation we should have for the work of all people no matter what their faith persuasion.

A. Genesis 1 and 2

However, in Genesis we just read that God worked, he got his hands dirty in the dust. And in the Garden of Eden where everything is perfect and good and whole – he gives Adam and Eve work. Why? It is part of the perfect created order, what a good and whole life is. That means that work is good, valuable and important.

Adam and Eve were to take what God had made and make things out of it. God created from nothing, they were to create something good and beautiful and useful out of the good creation. In that sense they work out the image of God in them as co-creators in this world.

And when you think about it, virtually everything we do in life is the making of something into something else. We make a tree into wooden planks, we make gold into rings, we make wool into clothes, and we make pigs into bacon.

God creates with his hands in the dirt. When Jesus comes to this earth he comes as a carpenter. All honest work is good.

2. Work has a purpose (Ps 147:13-14)

It is so vital that we see this as Christians. Martin Luther really helps us here. He points out the fact that all over the Bible God says he is the one who provides for and he loves everything and feeds every living creature. But the food does not magically appear on our tables. How does God do that? Through farmers and the labourers who work in the fields; through those people who sort and pack, the person who delivers the items to the shop and the whole staff who run the supermarket when we usually pick it up off the shelf. God takes credit! So Luther says we are God’s fingers in doing all these kinds of work. God is caring for his creation through ordinary work (menial labour). This gives dignity to all kinds of work – even the kind our society tends to look down upon as menial manual labour.

Luther also points to the scripture in Psalms (He makes the bars of your gates secure) Ps 147:13. When the bars and gates of your city were secure it meant you lived in a safe and stable city. But the Bible say it is God who strengthens the bars of your gates. How? Through security staff, council workers and government employees, politicians – all of who make sure we have secure and well run cities! They too are God’s fingers in this world. That adds a new dimension of dignity and worth to all work, but especially the kind that is feels boring and menial at times. All work is God caring for you. If the people who come to collect the rubbish we create don’t come we will die.

All kinds of work – from the simplest to the most complex is good (as long as it is moral) and God is using that and working through it. This stops us from looking down at anybody. If you do your work well you are honouring God. How am I a good Christian Just do your work well. And that is honouring to God.

So, if you want to know: “how to serve God best at work?” Or “what is God’s will for me at work?” The answer is: do your work really, really well. SIMPLE!

B. A bit more complicated

It is can be a bit more complicated than that. There are different applications for a playwright, a music artist, a CEO, a computer programmer, a teacher, or a baker. How do you bake to the glory of God? Bake the best bread you possibly can at a reasonable price point! And if you own the bakery it will also be about how you treat your staff, holidays, time off, accountability, wages etc.

But how can you be a playwright or a teacher to the glory of God? It is more complicated than write great plays and teach great classes. It will largely depend on how you answer the more fundamental questions of life (what is life about? What gives a life value? What dominant cultural narratives need to be challenged?). How do you include these into the plays you write? What is quality education? What about issues of access and diversity and inclusion and who holds the power in the classroom.

3. Work has a trajectory (restoration)

The Christian faith gives you hope for your work. We know that the end of the story is the restoration of all things. God is doing that restoration through the work that you are doing. But her is the thing: if you became a lawyer you wanted to make things right; if you became a doctor you want to see healing; if you go into art you want to show people great beauty. But because of the fall you will find that you can work really, really hard in your work and find that there is not very much fruit for all your labour. People still get sick and die, criminals get away, children fail at school. But Christianity gives you hope. The passions that we have for the human race to be all

that it can be will be frustrated by the fall... there is hope because if you are a city planner there is a new Jerusalem, if you are a lawyer there is a Just Judge, if you are an artist there is infinite beauty in the city with streets of gold, if you are a teacher there is a time when all will know and understand, if you are in food and beverage there is a feast (the wedding feast of the Lamb). That gives us hope.

Conclusion

Work is good despite the fact that it is hard

Work has purpose because we are God's fingers in the world

Work has trajectory because God is going to restore all things one day (your work will find its fullest meaning)

Questions

Read Genesis 1:26-28, 2:7-9, 15

- 1) Work is good. How are we tempted to live as if it is not good?
- 2) Why is work good? Think about this in relation to being made in the image of God.
- 3) How does the goodness of work relate to Genesis 3:17-19?

Read Ps 147:12-14, Deuteronomy 32:10-13 (in the context he is taking about Israel)

- 4) Drawing on Martin Luther, Tim Keller writes "The headwaters of Lutheran theology put special stress on the dignity of all work, observing that God cared for, fed, clothed, sheltered, and supported the human race through our human labour. When we work, we are, as those in the Lutheran tradition often put it, "the fingers of God," the agents of his providential love for others."² Think about all the different kinds of work that people do.
 - a) How are different kinds of work the "fingers of God"?
 - b) What about your work?
 - c) How does this change the way you look at your work?
- 5) Grant suggested that you can answer the question, "What is God's will for me in my work?" with the answer: do your work really, really well.
 - a) What does that mean for you?
 - b) For some kinds of work, it may be more complicated. Discuss what it means to be a good CEO or music artist or teacher/lecturer, etc. How do Christian convictions and foundational beliefs effect these kinds of work?
- 6) When Christ return he will restore all things (Acts 3:21). How is this trajectory in work an encouragement to you?

² Every Good Endeavor: Connecting Your Work to God's Work, Timothy Keller