

*Work and our labour in the Lord.* A Labour Day Sunday sermon, preached on September 2, 2018 at St. Giles Presbyterian Church Prince George BC by Rev. Herb Hilder.

Lessons; GENESIS 1:26-31  
I THESSALONIANS 4:9-12  
LUKE 12:13-34

It is for many, the week-end that signals the end of summer.

Growing up, it was the last week-end the best municipal swimming pool was open  
The last week-end of sleeping in late  
The last week-end for shorts and flip flops  
It was the week-end one got ready to head back to school – new grade, and sometimes new school.  
As a parent, it is often the week-end to help their kids get settled into residence, apartments or rooms in a house.

A reminder that we are all maturing!  
For those who finished their formal schooling in June,  
It was in then times the point of starting a new job or looking for work.  
My mother always wondered whether I would ever have a real job!

She supported my one post-secondary school degree – but three!!!

I have always found this to be a poignant  
memory charged week-end,

Growing up in a manufacturing and small  
industry town, strangely I never thought much  
about the week-end's origins...

To me the Labour Day week-end was that  
week-end of picnics, drives and walks along the  
Niagara Boulevard or going to Port Colborne to  
watch and ogle the small pleasure craft in the  
Niagara River and Lake Erie.

As I have watched the workplace dramatically  
change in so many ways,

Job security become an oxymoron for so many  
I have begun to see this week-end especially as a  
time to yes, enjoy the last week-end of the summer,

But also to give thanks for those who  
pioneered and continue to advocate for more  
humane working conditions.

And further to wonder what we as God's people  
can and ought to be doing to make the workplace  
more humane, more grace filled.

Not easy in a world that is often more interested in  
profit and monetary results than in how those  
things are achieved and the long term cost to the  
workers.

In Canada, Labour Day was born in the city of  
Toronto when the Toronto Printers Union lobbied  
its employers for a shorter work week.

The Union was asking for a 9 hour work day.

The employers repeatedly ignored their workers for the works went on strike March 25, 1872.

Toronto's publishing industry was paralyzed – big industry in 1872!

They were joined by other workers and on April 14<sup>th</sup> of the same year, 2,000 workers marched through the streets of Toronto showing solidarity

By the time they arrived at the provincial capital buildings at Queen's Park their parade had 10,000 participants – 1/10<sup>th</sup> of Toronto's total population!

The employers of course retaliated – scabs were brought in from nearby towns

Strike leaders were charged with criminal conspiracy – for in 1872 unions were illegal in Canada.

The Federal government stepped in and shortly the Trade Union Act was passed – decriminalizing unions

And strike leaders were released from jail

The workers did not achieve their immediate goals of a shorter work week

Many still lost their jobs for their participation

However the strike did prove that the workers could gain the attention of their employers and the public and most significantly,

Their political leaders IF they worked together.

An annual celebration of workers' rights was adopted in many cities throughout Canada.

In 1884 under mounting pressure from the workers, the then Prime Minister, Sir John Thompson declared Labor Day a national holiday.

Over the years since, the focus of Labor Day has certainly changed,  
 But the reality of bad working conditions, nasty treatment of workers, bad bosses within the working place has continued.  
 In many instances – worsened.

I worked for a season in a unionized company,

The bulk of my working life though, I have not.

Though I remember years ago a cousin who was a higher up in the Toronto Electricians Union said, you guys (church) should form a union. I'd be happy to help you....

In the matter of unions – I can see their benefits, but I am also aware that too often the wrong people get into union leadership – not to help their members rather to feather their own nest as it were.

I am though a follower of Jesus – pro Gospel. And in preparation for this Labour Day week-end Sunday, , I asked myself and I ask you, what do the scriptures say about workplaces, work forces and work in general?

Secondly, how can we as God's people show or demonstrate in our lives a more Godly perspective in the workplace?

I believe we need to remember that the Bible's story of the world opens with God doing work – *six days of it*.

Once completed, not from weariness, but because the work was done,

God rested on the 7<sup>th</sup> day.

The Genesis reading this morning reminds us that humans were not created for passive observation of the world, but for an epic task – a worldwide venture.

**“Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth.” Gen 1:28**

Work is therefore built into the created order, right from the start

God gave man stewardship of the land and all of life in it

The truth that too many view work as drudgery and a pain,

That many bosses and supervisors are trolls or worse

That working conditions for so many are dangerous, unfulfilling and grinding

Or that we too often individuals solely on what they do for work – pity the redundant, the superannuated, the retired who have not found their feet yet

And even those who have if work is the sole judging factor of one's worth

All this negative stuff is a consequence of living in a world that is out of joint, sinful, not as God meant it.

So,

How can we as God's people introduce the truth of God's grace =, God's love, God's mercy in workplaces that are too often graceless, unmerciful, unforgiving and most definitely unloving?

*Begin to recognize and act accordingly that everyone's work is important – all work is sanctified.*

The best practitioner of this was one Brother Lawrence – a Carmelite lay brother who served in monastery in the 17<sup>th</sup> century.

His book, The Practice of the Presence of God, is still in print and rightly so.

It's an easy and insightful read!

While in the kitchen scrubbing dirty pots and pans, Brother Lawrence felt as close to God as he did while in the church singing Psalms/

**The time of business, does not with one differ from the time of prayer, and the noise and the clutter of my kitchen...I possess God in as great tranquility as if I were on my knees.**

*As God's people, as a follower of Jesus, make Biblical principles more than Sunday only observances.*

I wonder....what would happen if each of us were to make Philippians 4:8

**Whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about<sup>[b]</sup> these things.**

Or this morning's epistle reading from I Thessalonians part of our job description.

It is not easy to do...I know this very well. Many do their work without ever being recognized or appreciated

I know that many labour to exhaustion. I once worked in a large church where on Friday mornings the senior minister and I would debrief about what had been accomplished that particular week.

Some weeks were quieter than others, but we were both clocking roughly 55-60 hours a week and as you can imagine in a congregation of 1,400 there was always someone sick, in crisis, in need etc. Every time when I would remark not a bad week eh?

He would growl and glare at me – think so, Herbert. Look at what we have not done!!

It was a bad lesson to have imprinted.

And it has taken most of my ministry to wean myself from such an attitude and to truly celebrate the things accomplished

And not to be preoccupied by what has not been done!!

I also know full well that the workplace is full of ethical landmines

But –what if we were in God’s strength try to practice Biblical principals in the workplace?

**Mind our own affairs** (from Thessalonians) – not be drawn into office gossip and drama

**Aspire to live quietly** – do your work well and not always murmuring about your place in a particular office or workplace

**Honorable and commendable** – our work itself has intrinsic value to God – yes it does – so doing a good job is actually an act of worship....

**Whatever is pure** – as an employee I will make it a part of my job description to think pure thoughts about my boss and my fellow workers.

Question: If my fellow employees, if my supervisor or boss could read my mind, would they be embarrassed? Would I?

As an employee I will make it my job to expect no less than excellence in my work – whatever that work is!

Question to self: could God feel good about signing my paycheck?



Meditate on the things about your work that  
 are the best, not the worst  
 The beautiful, not the ugly  
 Things to praise, not things to curse  
Always keep in mind that the ultimate Master you  
 are serving is Jesus.

*Be aware and sensitive to the working conditions of others.* This is yet another way we can help the workplace more graceful and Godly.

One of the most insightful TV programmes in recent years was Undercover Boss  
 Briefly the programme looked at a particular company or corporation where the CEO disguised himself or herself as a trainee in the company he or she ran.

Walking the policies or the fields I call it  
 Talking to the people on the line

It was revelatory to the CEO –often poignant as the workers shared with the disguised CEO their struggles in life outside the company  
 As well as suggestions to improve their work in the company.

At the end of the show, there was the reveal where the people who had met the CEO were summoned to the corporate headquarters and meet the “trainee” .

Sometimes there were reprimands, but most often there were gifts given to those people –donations to

charity of choice, money for further educational training, expenses for medical treatment, long delayed holidays.

How can we as God's people make workplaces, those who we serve and especially serve us more reflective of the grace, mercy, love and generosity of God?

*Treat all people with respect and dignity just as you have been treated by God first.*

In the week before Jane left for Toronto last year,  
We met for our last weekly coffee date at Starbucks in College Heights  
I wanted to know what she thought about working retail – moving from Garden Centre worker to Supervisor to IC Human Relationships and charity programmes and events through Canadian Tire store #360

She told me how much she had learned about herself and dealing with the general public.  
As I listened, they were lifetime lessons learned.

Then she said, 'Do you know what I find really troubling Dad  
People with whom we deal especially at customer care seem much more poorly behaved, angry and belligerent than when I first began.  
More often now we are blamed for their mistakes and forgetfulness – even to the point of being

blamed that they had bought the items in the first place.

Some claim that an item has never been used, yet it is filthy, often broken and they have no receipt and wonder why we question their returning it.

Some people come in and treat us like we are stupid because we are wearing a red Canadian tire shirt  
What is really a bit much Dad is that I know some of these difficult people are church people.

Sadly, they are often they most obstinate and rude with staff...

Daughter Ruth makes no secret that when she was in Ottawa working wait staff in a restaurant situated within walking distance of 5 large churches,

The worse time to be on duty was Sunday – the after church lunch crowd.

Not all of the Christians behaved badly, but enough of them did to make it a negative memory for the restaurant staff.

Demanding, bordering of rudeness

Conveying a sense of entitlement

Crabby when the food was slow or an order got mixed up – even though many of the tables said

Ruth played musical chairs between courses

Gossipy about what was wrong with the morning service – minister, choir, anthem, noisy children

And tipping – either nonexistent or grudgingly given.

Big sacrifice to give a quarter or . 50 cents for a \$25.00 lunch eh

And a thank you for the service – some individuals could not even offer this

Sad – for wherever there is a human being there is an opportunity for a kindness!

And Ruth tells me this is not only an Ottawa phenomenon – rude lunch time Christians.

You know, unless each of us are careful, WE ourselves can be the best tool for de-evangelism. The wider world is watching each of us who profess to follow Jesus – do not think otherwise !

Question: Does our behavior, our words and thoughts accurately reflect the God who has already given us so much first?

By all means on this last week-end of the summer, Continue to enjoy it with picnics, outings and time together

But also take a moment to resolve to put into practice ways, means, behaviours and actions that could make the people in workplace more aware of the grace, the mercy, the love, the kindness of God. We owe it to Him who has already given us these things so richly and generously.

AMEN Let us pray