

Sermon - "Whistling While You Work"

**September 6, 2009
Ecclesiastes 2:24**

The Seven Little Men got ready for work, as they did every day.
They put on their pants, shirts, and hoods. They tightened their belts.

Each took his pick-axe and swung it to his shoulder.

Off to the mine they marched in a line, singing as they went,
"Hi Ho, Hi Ho, it's off to work we go..."

At the window, watching them go, was Snow White.
As the dwarfs disappeared down the road, she went to her own tasks
with a song to her animal helpers:
**Just whistle while you work...
And cheerfully together we can tidy up the place
So hum a merry tune ...
It won't take long when there's a song to help you set the pace!**

I hold that picture before you today
not as a bit of escapist entertainment, but as a serious example to imitate.

For in its own way, the Bible urges us to do that very thing,
to enjoy our toil, to "whistle while we work"!

That's a message woven through the Book of Ecclesiastes. Listen to what
wise Solomon tells us in chapter 2, verse 24 (and repeats in three other places):
**There is nothing better for a man that that he should eat and drink
and find enjoyment in his toil.**

Enjoy your toil! Whistle while you work!

A fitting piece of advice for a Labor Day weekend, don't you think?

I looked up Labor Day in Wikipedia and learned that
Labor Day was begun in New York City, and later made a federal holiday in 1884.
It celebrates the American worker...that's us!

Even though it isn't a churchly festival,
it's a good time for us as the people of God to pause before diving in...
to think about our work and our attitude toward it.

Here's where I'd like you to help me with today's sermon.

In the bulletin, there's a space provided underneath the sermon title.

Would you take a pencil or pen and write in what your JOB is.

Kids, if you are in school, your job is "studying" or "being a student"

Stay at home parents, your very important work is "Parenting"

Retirees, even if you're retired, you likely have some kind of work that occupies your time. List it there.

Now, the key issue. How do you feel about your work?

LOVE IT? TOLERATE IT? CAN'T STAND IT?

Be truthful about that, and try to supply the reason after the word "because..."

The topic of WORK is a big one in the Bible.

God cares not only about your Sabbath day activities,
but about what you do the other six days of the week!

Why? Because He made us in His image. What He does, we are to do.
God WORKED six days, then he RESTED. We work all week, then we rest.

And what is that appointed work?

In Genesis 2, Adam is put in charge of Eden, to "**till it and keep it.**"

He was, and we still are, STEWARDS of the earth.

We are charged with the daily task of caring for the world and each other,
as managers for God.

Let's take stock of what we do... (hands, please)

How many are STUDENTS? TEACHERS?

Anyone here this morning work in Health Care industry?

Law enforcement? Manufacturing? Real Estate? Computer-related?

How about others? (tell me...)

Whatever our job, God's intent is that we ENJOY IT!

But there's a problem. Many of us don't.

Someone has put poisoned apples in our lunch pails!

I guessing that for at least some of us, the work day does NOT begin
with us leaping from bed with a shout of delight
and whistling as we head out the driveway.

A more frequent scenario might be that the alarm clock rings, and we groan.
There comes a hurried breakfast.

A quick review of the day's lengthy "to do list."

A commute through snarled traffic, and a snide comment from a co-worker
as we arrive a little later than planned.

Why do we work? Well, because there are bills to pay!

The marching song of the dwarfs has been replaced with what I saw recently on a
bumper sticker:

I owe, I owe, so off to work I go!

Snow White's whistling is replaced by Tennessee Ernie Ford's work-day
dirge:

Sixteen tons, and whaddya get?

Another day older and deeper in debt

St. Peter, don't you call me 'cause I can't go

I owe my soul to the company store

Forget the song. We can say it in plain English.

Many people don't like their work. Or their co-workers. Or their bosses.
Or all of the above.

There's white-collar crime. Drinking on the job. Boredom. And just plain laziness.

After my HS graduation, I went to work at a warehouse for a summer.
There I got a quick education about the state of the workplace.

As I pushed my floor-cleaning machine past the railroad dock,
I found my fellow workers sitting in a yet-to-be-unloaded boxcar...
drinking beers...and with them, the unit supervisor, also drinking.

I looked, dumbfounded.

They laughed at me, and went on drinking.

Even if we embrace our work and do our best, we face unpleasant challenges.

It's hard to fight the traffic.

Hard to get ahead of the bills.

Hard to see a noble purpose in what we do day after day.

The Greeks had a story about a fellow named Sisyphus, who was condemned by the gods to rolling a boulder up a hill.

But before he could get it to the top, it would roll back down, and he had to do it over again... and again and again... forever.

It feels like that to a lot of people. Maybe to you. What has gone wrong with work?

The Bible says it happened early on.

Adam and Eve transgressed the Maker's rules. Decided to do it their way, not His.

Just one chapter after Adam is assigned as Eden's care-taker, he is hauled in before the Boss, who tells his rebellious worker:

**“Cursed is the ground because of you!
In toil shall you eat of it all the days of your life.
Thorns and thistles it shall bring forth to you...
In the sweat of your face you shall eat bread till you return to the ground.”**

That's the way it's been ever since.

The problem with our work is the problem that hangs over all our human endeavors.

The problem of SIN – our rebellion against the Master
and our competition with our co-workers

In Ecclesiastes, Solomon's urge to enjoy our work is written with resignation, for he knows that here “under the sun” there's much that's out of sync in our daily life and work.

Here are two of the problems, he says.

Many workers are driven by envy rather than love, to have more than others rather than to serve them. Vanity, he says.

And then there is the uncertainty of the future.

“When a man dies,” he asks sadly, **“who knows whether he will leave all that he has earned to a wise man or a fool?”**
Vanity! All is vanity!

Solomon's conclusion? Might as well try and enjoy yourself now, since there is not much else to look forward to under the sun!

So is there any hopeful word for workers on this Labor Day weekend?

Let's look back at those dwarves for a moment.

There was a reason they went so happily to their work, wasn't there?
She was standing at the door to send them off and welcome them back.
She worked with a song, and her joy was infectious.

God designed it to be that way for us.
Instead of leaving us alone with our toil and our trouble,
He sent someone to come and live among us – someone whose presence would
put a song in our hearts no matter what the day might hold.

Jesus came to work alongside us.

Even as a child he had a strong sense of vocation:
“Don't you know,” He asked his mother, **“that I must be about my
Father's business?”**

No, not the carpentry business of his earthly father, Joseph,
though doubtless He did that work cheerfully and well.

I mean the business of His heavenly Father...the great work of
seeking and freeing all of us who've had our noses to the Devil's grindstone.

Think of all the things He did to accomplish the Father's assignment!
He was a STUDENT of Scripture at home.
He became a TEACHER on hillsides, lakes, and synagogues.
He did the work of a HEALER for countless sick ones
and the FEEDER of multitudes.
All the while He daily MENTORED the Twelve.

Gathered with his disciples in the Upper Room on Maundy Thursday, He
prayed a prayer of thanks to His Father that He had
“accomplished the work” He had been given.

A work brought to its gracious completion the next day
as He offered His life to pay the price
to set us free from our SLAVERY here “under the sun.”

“It is finished” He said.

“And we are free!” we may now say and sing.

A country boy was listening to sermon about Romans 6:23.

“The wages of sin is death!” the preacher thundered.

The boy turned to his brother and whispered,

“Well, if the Devil ain’t gonna pay any better than that, I ain’t gonna work for Him n’more!”

No, and we won’t either!

Not for the Devil as Boss any more.

Not out of envy or competition any more.

Not for Death as a paycheck any more.

For we have a new Master.

A gracious one who paid the price for our freedom
who forgives the sins of the workplace
who sings a song of love and life in our ears.

And we have a larger Vision of the work we do.

For it is no longer simply laying carpet, or grading papers,
or baking cakes, or delivering mail...

now it has become what it was meant to be –

serving one another in love,

being the very hands of Christ for our neighbors so that in our work
they may MEET HIM!

God’s promise, you know, is not just about CHURCH WORK, but about
ALL THE WORK WE DO...

“in the Lord your LABOR is not in vain”!

There’s an old story about a man who went to watch the construction of a
cathedral in France centuries ago.

On one section he saw three stonemasons working on a wall.

“What are you doing?” he asked the first.

“I am laying stone,” was the man’s reply.

“What are you doing?” he asked the second.

“I am building a wall,” the man said.

“What are you doing?” he asked the third.

“Ah,” smiled the man, “I am helping to build a cathedral where God will come close to us!”

They were all doing the same thing. Yet not the same!

For that last man’s work had been taken up into the larger vision of life offered by St. Paul:

“So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God!” (1 Corinthians 10:31)

Look once more at what you wrote on your bulletin a few minutes ago.

See it now in a new way, knowing that Jesus has come to give you
a New Master
and a New Purpose.

Knowing Him, it will be a lot easier to whistle while you work!

Now may the peace of God, which passes all understanding, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.