

Sermon Series: Take Five Take Three: "Just A Job?"

John 17:1-7; Romans 12:1-8

Salem United Methodist Church

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A friend sent me a picture of a rooster walking proudly with his comb standing erect, but he looked like he had been in the fight of his life. Half of his feathers were gone and the others looked like they were stripped with only the barbs showing. The caption read, "It's been a tough week. I made it through, how about you?" We don't know if the rooster won or lost, but we do know he survived! The purpose of our Sermon Series, "Take Five," is to help us regain perspective on a harried, dog-eat-dog world. So far we have talked about the importance of taking Sabbath time for rest and renewal, time to reconnect with God and others. Last week we made an assessment of the principles and values we live by. Today we will be examining how the jobs we do, paid and/or unpaid, can be an offering to God.

I have a glass of water. How heavy do you think this glass of water is? We can weigh it in ounces, but its absolute weight doesn't matter. How heavy it is depends on how long I hold it. If I hold it for a few minutes, it won't seem heavy at all. If I hold it for an hour, my arm will ache. If I hold it for a day, it would be torture. My arm will get weak, maybe even go numb. It would be paralyzing, exhausting! The weight of the glass doesn't change, but the longer I hold it, the heavier it becomes. This glass of water is like the stresses of life. Sometimes we hold the stresses in our life for a while and then we can let go of them. Sometimes we hold onto them quite a bit longer and then they begin to cause us spiritual, emotional, and mental pain. And if we hold on to stress for extended periods of time, we are tortured, exhausted, and even paralyzed! We become incapable of doing anything.

Whatever our current jobs are now, a paid position and/or the unpaid job of daily living, we have stress. In a paid position, there is the stress of job performance, being the boss, working for the boss, working with colleagues, doing what is right, customer service, job security, etc. In the unpaid job of daily living, there are stresses of financial pressures, keeping fit and healthy, chronic illness, relationships with family, rearing children, loneliness, national and international political situations, etc. When we hold onto these for a short period of time, the burden is heavy. When we hold onto these for longer periods of time, we ache. And if we hold onto them all the time, we are exhausted to the point that it can affect our physically, mentally, emotionally, and spiritually. Sabbath time is a time to take a break from these stressors as best we can. One idea from Wayne Muller who wrote the book, *Sabbath: Remembering the Sacred Rhythm of Rest and Delight*, invites us to write down our stressors, our worries, our concerns and put them in a Sabbath box. By doing so, we are giving our minds, bodies, and souls a rest from these stressors. Another example of this comes from a story I heard once. An adult son who was discovering the stress of balancing career and family was reflecting on his father's life. As an adult he had become aware of the stressful job his father had when he was a child, yet his father never showed any signs of stress at home. The son wondered how the father had done this. So he went to ask his Dad how he coped. His father replied, "When I walked in the door each evening, I hung up my hat and coat. As I did this, I literally visualized leaving the stress of the job in the closet with my hat and coat. The next morning when I put it on, I prayed for God to show me how to cope with the stress I was facing that day." This father refused to allow the stresses of each day to destroy his family life. He sat it aside and picked it up later. In some way we do this in our worship services. We have a time for concerns in which we both verbally and silently lift up that which stresses us. The difference between offering a prayer and setting aside our stresses is that in prayer we are offering our concerns, our stressors to God. Sometimes in my prayer time, I literally envision handing God the concern. I envision putting it in the hands of God. I can walk away from the prayer not with a sense that I have abandoned my concern, but knowing that God is greater than any concern that I have. I know that when I connect my heart with God's, I am not tackling any concern alone. God in Christ is journeying with me. So Sabbath can be a time of surrendering a problem to God, knowing that God is larger than us healing the world.

This is exactly what Jesus did when he prayed the real Lord's prayer, the one he prayed before his arrest and Crucifixion. Jesus had finished the job he had to do. From the world's point of view, Jesus was unemployed. In fact, he was a homeless immigrant. He had traveled from Galilee to Jerusalem to do the job God had given him. In his prayer, Jesus says to God that he has glorified God in his job. In all Jesus' teaching, preaching, healing, one thing he didn't do was to bring glory to himself. In every part of his job, Jesus elevated God. He exalted God. The tasks that Jesus did always pointed to God. No matter what our job is, paid and/or the unpaid job of living, what work has God given you to do? How do you honor God in your work? Yesterday I encountered one of our Salem servants pulling weeds. In our conversation, she mentioned that she tried to see everything she did in life from pulling weeds to greeting people to tackling the world's problems as "a labor of love." Pulling weeds is not a prestigious job by any means. Some people wouldn't think of giving up their Saturday morning to pull weeds in someone else's yard. Why would this person give up her precious time to pull weeds? She wasn't pulling weeds to glorify herself. Everyone notices when weeds are growing out of control, but no one notices the weeds when they are gone. In this humble act of pulling weeds, "the labor of love" God was revealed to me. How do we see our jobs as a "labor of love?" How do we reveal God through our jobs? How do we glorify God in all our jobs?

When we see our employment and/or the job of living as something we have to do, "same thing every day, another day, another dollar," are lives can be meaningless. The stress of it all can weigh us down to the point that we think we will break and sometimes we do break! Paul gave some sound advice to the Christians in the city of Rome. This advice still holds. Eugene Peterson interpreted it this way, "God helping you: Take your every day, ordinary life-your sleeping, eating, going-to-work, and walking-around life-and place it before God as an offering. Embracing what God does for you is the best thing you can do for God." God is always there wanting to help us in the ordinariness of our lives. God waits for us to offer the ordinariness of our lives to God. Babies who are learning to walk will offer a hand to a bi-ped, someone who can walk, to help stabilize them, to balance them, and then off they go toddling across the floor holding a hand. God waits for the offer of our hand to steady our feet, to stabilize us, to transform our ordinariness into God's glory. Embracing what God does for us is the best thing we can do for God.

The other part of giving God glory in our "jobs" is using what God has already given us to bless another. Again, Eugene Peterson's translation relates: preach only God's love, teach what you are to teach; encourage don't be bossy; don't manipulate; give aid to those in distress, be open and quick to respond to a need; don't be irritated or depressed by those who have less advantages than you. Think about this. When have we thought we knew it all and were preachy or taught something we knew nothing about? More than likely it did not glorify God, too. When have we been bossy and not encouraging? When have we been manipulative? When have we refused to give someone in distress aid? When have we not responded to a need quickly? When have we been irritated or depressed by others who do not have the advantages we have? As I wrote these questions, I thought about the many issues in our world. How do we answer these questions on a personal basis, a national one, and an international one? How do we glorify God in all things? Is it even possible?

I believe it is, if we take five minutes, days, weeks, months, or years, to connect with God, to offer up our stressors, and to strive to glorify God in the paid and/or unpaid positions of daily living.

I invite us to take five, take Sabbath time, offer our stressors and our jobs to God, then take God's hand to lead us. Each of us is important to God. Each of us has a special job to do and God has already given us the gifts to do that job. Remember the words of Paul? "Keep a smile on your face." God will bless that smile inwardly to give us strength and outwardly as it encourages others.

Resources: *Sabbath: Remembering the Sacred Rhythm of Rest and Delight* by Wayne Muller; Sermon Series: "W**k-Not Just Another Four Letter Word," from UMChurch of the Resurrection; Carmen McRae-Take Five 1961 with Dave Brubeck quartet, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sNWSr6N72yQ&list=RDsNWSr6N72yQ>

