

Take This Job and Love It  
Genesis 1:26-28  
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9-1-13

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**Then God said, “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.”**

**So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. And God blessed them. And God said to them, “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 heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth.”**

*Living and risen Jesus Christ, pour fourth your spirit now over us. You who poured your spirit over creation and brought life into existence from the void might speak life into your church, into our lives.*

Tomorrow morning, many of you will wake early to the sound of your alarm, and what you will be faced with is the inevitability which you have faced week in and week out, year in and year out: that work is an inevitability. In one way or another, we have to work. But there is one thing we can control about Mondays, and that is how will we view this very important, and very time-consuming aspect of life?

The question from our text this morning is not, “Do you have a job?” but “Will you give yourself to your kingdom assignment?” Is work something you suffer through, like a root canal? Or do you see your job as the place God has placed you for the majority of your adult life in order to reflect Christ in a different sphere? I love the quote from the 19<sup>th</sup> century Dutch journalist and politician Abraham Kuyper, who says there is not a single inch of this world in which God doesn’t say, “Mine.” Have you given God your work?

As I’ve been reading through Genesis 1 this week and last, I was struck by the way that God the creator of the universe chooses to introduce himself to us. I mean, this is book one chapter one, and there is, no doubt about it, awe and reverence and glory for the supreme being of God. But you do not want to miss the fact that when God chooses to reveal himself to humanity, he does so as a construction worker, an Israelite Construction Worker. Perhaps there is something inherently valuable about work.

And what’s funny is that seen in this light, the days of creation sound a bit like a time sheet God gives to the Egyptian taskmaster. This is how I spent my week: building, separating, refining, cultivating. Day one, two, three, day six God works and then on the seventh day, pfffew, God rested.

But I keep wondering, why wouldn’t God introduce himself as a supreme ruler, rich and

powerful, lavish and untouched by toil instead? Why would God, as one writer puts it, reveal himself as God with dirt under his fingernails? Now this is going to sound simplistic, but here goes: God loves creation. God loves the things God made, like a gardener gently tends to his flowerbeds, God gently tends to the world and us people. And because God is so adoring and enamored with what he made, we get to be his coworkers.

What you will discover if you look at other creation narratives of the Ancient Near East is that many share similar characteristics, with the exception of one thing—the way god interacts with people. In the Enuma Elish, which is the Babylonian creation account, there is this great battle of the gods, and Marduk, the king of the victorious group of gods creates the world by slitting open the body of a god he destroys.

Then he invites the other gods to come live in this world. The other gods say to Marduk, "Uh, sorry Mar, too much maintenance. We're afraid if we live there, we're going to have to work," and then Marduk says, and this is in tablet 6 of the Enuma Elish, "I will produce a lowly, primitive creature. Man shall be his name, and to him shall be charged the work so that the gods may have rest." You see here in the Enuma Elish, work is bad. The gods don't work. Human beings work so the gods can rest. It's completely different from what the Bible says about work.

Here in Genesis, we find something that flies in the face of what everyone believed about work: Work is something God does. Work is good, and work is something God enjoys. In fact, after God says, **"Let us make man in Our image, in our likeness..."** He puts them in a garden He planted to work it and care for it. He gives them work. You know what that means? It means work is in paradise. Work is in the Garden of Eden. It's right there in paradise, in perfection, where everything is as it should be.

There is beauty...God gave them beautiful things to look at...spirituality...God walks with them in the cool of the day...God gave them sexuality, and friendship, and work. The Bible has this incredibly, incredibly positive view of work and not just work but all work. See what's interesting is Genesis 2:7 where it says, **"The Lord God formed the man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being."**

Perhaps there is more to work. Maybe we're missing something that can be profoundly exhilarating in our work. Maybe you and I are invited to see ourselves more intimately as part of God's crew. And that perhaps it matters less what we do, and more so of the manner in which we do it.

So as we read Genesis one, and as we read John 15 just a few minutes ago, I find myself asking a few questions. First of all, how does God view work?

In the cult classic film *Office Space*, Peter, the unmotivated employee of Inetech, one day has an epiphany that everything he does in his work is utterly meaningless. That filling out TPS Reports and sending them off to one of a multitude of bosses, literally has no

meaning in the grand scheme of things. Peter dreams of a life in which he does nothing. I bet many of us have fantasized at one time or another about never having to go to work again and just doing nothing. But have you ever done nothing for more than a few days? It becomes agonizing. And do you know why it's agonizing? Because inactivity is out of sync with God's plan. God is not a God of inactivity and leisure,

As the movie *Office Space* concludes, Peter realizes that a life void of work is no better than a life filled with meaningless work. So as it closes you see him, hard hat in hand working on a construction site, shoveling and hammering and building something, and we're reminded that work is valuable. Work is a gift.

But God doesn't just create for utility, God creates to appreciate. God delights in the fruits of his labor. God took the darkness and the void, in Hebrew *Tovu vo vohu*, just sounds ominous, doesn't it? And God puts his hands to it, separating it into light and darkness, then steps back and appreciates it. It is good. Then God separates water from land, earth from the sky, God puts his hands into the dirt and brings vegetation from the earth, God goes into the workshop and fashions birds and beasts, fish, and finally people and after each one of these distinct days of work, God steps back and says, "Wow, I did good. Look at that fish there, you ever see a fish like that?" God looked at that fish or another like it and said, "My stars what a beautiful fish"—which is remarkable, cause you ever see some of the fish God created? Those things are ugly.

**Genesis teaches us that work without appreciation, or work only for the sake of utility (paying the bills, buying food, making more money) is dangerous. Appreciation, beauty, enjoyment are intricately woven into meaningful work.**

The founder of our Church tradition, John Calvin, warns about valuing things only for their utility. "Did God create food only to provide for nutrition and not also for delight and good cheer? So too the purpose of clothing apart from necessity (protection) was beauty and style. Is grasses, trees and fruits, apart from their various uses, there is beauty of appearance and pleasantness of fragrance... Did he not, in short, render many things attractive to us, apart from their necessary use?"

In other words, we are to look at everything and say something like:

All things bright and beautiful; all creatures great and small. All things wise and wonderful—the Lord God made them all.

Unless we take time from our work to appreciate what God has created and is using in us, we will never truly experience meaning in our lives.

Finally, God sees work as something to be shared with us. In John's gospel that we read this morning, John reminds us that you and I did not choose God, but God chose us and appointed us so that we could go and bear fruit, fruit that will abide in God. You know, there is a dangerous thing in our culture today. I will call it work-defined identity. People are being defined by what they do and what they can produce or accomplish. But one

author puts it this way when she says jobs are just not big enough for people. People are more than mere employees. We are God's divinely appointed teammates in accomplishing Kingdom work.

We are made in God's image, the Bible says. The word *image* comes from the Hebrew for *hue* or *to cut*. So that's why the 10 commandments are so adamant about not carvings as idols, because God says you are the only authorized version of God's representation. In ancient times, kings were thought to be the human representation of the gods. But the Bible tells it differently. The Bible says you are special. The Bible tells us that every human being is an image of the invisible God. You and I are made in Christ's image, like him in every way but our sin, and he is the image of the invisible God. You have very special purpose, you have inherent value. Do you know that it is not because of what you do that makes you special? No, you are special, you are chosen, you are holy, and because of that reality, you can do great things with God.

A few months back, I had one of the greatest privileges of my ministry. Amy and I were invited to participate in the Annual Banquet for the Arc of Wabash—and organization for which our own Jane Willmert has worked for more than 30 years. For over 60 years, the Arc has recognized the gift and dignity of work and honored the God-given gifts in all people by providing training and life affirming work for people with developmental disabilities. That evening, we gathered together in the Honeywell Gym to celebrate the achievements and lives of people who, perhaps 100 years ago, would have been shuffled to the margins of society and dismissed as having no purpose or value. But what we witnessed in that evening was truly remarkable, because not only was work celebrated. More importantly the image of God, born by all people was on display. These men and women are image bearers of the most high God, the King of the Universe.

You are image bearers, they are image bearers, we are image bearers of the God who loves creation, who is at work redeeming creation. So you can see it follows that if we are made in the image of God, and God is working to redeem creation, we share in that process of redemption. Your work matters, not because it is valuable, but because you are valuable.

At the very beginning God put his hands into the ground and brought life in the garden of Creation. God worked and God said, "It is good." When God had completed his marvelous creation, he stepped back, looked at all he had done, and said, "It is finished," and God rested. Then those whom God created became dissatisfied with the simple beauty of what the Father had given to them, and chose their own way, fashioning and creating in their own image and falling further and further into disrepair and chaos. That is, until one day God, having seen enough – having seen how frantic and how destructive things had gotten, how out of order and void of meaning and rest – God, as he hung crucified on the cross said, "It is finished." And there in the cross of Calvary, meaning was restored to all work, redemption and purpose was restored to our lives, and through one defining work of restoration, rest and rhythm was brought back to our lives. Work and rest are a part of God's Holy rhythm.

To all the other nations of the earth, work was nothing more than the daily grind. To the people of God, it was the place where God's eternal goodness shows up. God shows up for work with you. Because truly there is not a single corner of all creation, not even your cubicle, your office, your shop, your classroom, or your minivan that the Lord of the universe does not lovingly say to us, "It's all mine. Won't you share in this wonderful endeavor with me?"