

“Loving Your Work”

Pastor Dave Carlson
First Presbyterian Church
September 20, 2015

New Testament Lesson: John 15:12-17

Old Testament Lesson: Psalm 100

Dorothy Sayers – she’s a detective story writer – Sayers argues that “work should be thought of ‘as a creative activity, undertaken for the love of the work itself.’ And the human, ‘made in God’s image, should make things as God makes them – for the sake of doing well a thing that is well worth doing. Work, says Sayers, is the natural exercise and function of (humankind) – the creature who is made in the image of (the) Creator.’¹

Today, we begin a four-part series on work, looking first at the essence of our work – its origin and foundation. Next week, we look at different types of work and how to know what we are called to do in life. Then, ways we can better position ourselves to step into our God-given work. And finally, what to do if we have the wrong job or role in life.

In Our New Testament lesson today, Jesus says to his disciples – and to us – “I do not call you servants any longer, because the servant does not know what the master is doing. Jesus, of course, knew what he was doing at all times – even amid any doubt he may have expressed. (Sometimes, being in doubt is what we are supposed to be doing.) But not when it comes to our role in life! Of that, there is no doubt, for those who are followers of Jesus. So, looking at Jesus, what do we know about our role in life, and how does that relate to our work? Jesus said, “This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. No one has greater love than this, to lay down one’s life for one’s friends.”

What does Jesus mean when he calls you to “*lay down (your) life for (your) friends?*” Anybody? What do you suppose that means? What are some ways that we lay down our lives for others? (*Congregation gives examples: Actually dying ... Giving of ourselves – our time, money and talents ...*) Yes, all of this is “laying down your life for others.” The foundation of our work is serving others. Think about it. If whatever you are doing at any one moment is not ultimately benefiting someone else, can it really be called work? And if work – at its essence – is being in service to others, can it really be all that bad? Work is not just another four-letter word – unless you count it among four-letter words like “love” and “give.”

That’s how Jesus defined work – giving of yourself in love for the benefit of others. So why is it so hard for so many to find fulfillment in their work? Well, it has a lot more to do with the individual than it does with the job.

¹ Leland Ryken, *Approach to Work and Leisure*, cited in *Context*, June 1, 1998.

Take for example, Markus Persson, the billionaire creator of the wildly popular computer game Minecraft. Here's what Persson tweeted last month about his work:²

"The problem with getting everything is you run out of reasons to keep trying, and human interaction becomes impossible due to imbalance." I think he's talking about the imbalance between people at different levels.

Two minutes later he tweeted this: "Hanging out ... with a bunch of friends and partying with famous people, able to do whatever I want, and I've never felt more isolated."

This was followed by a tweet at 4:53 a.m. that said: "Found a great girl, but she's afraid of me and my lifestyle and went with a normal person instead."

Minutes later, we read: "People who made sudden success are telling me this is normal and will pass. That's good to know! I guess I'll take a shower...!"

Finally, around 11:39 a.m., Persson says: "And just venting, and not feeling like I had to hide, made it feel a bit easier to cope with already. ❤️"

For Persson – like all people – happiness is not found in wealth or fame or access to the rich and famous, but rather, happiness is found in *just getting real*. – Just get real.

That is what Jesus is telling us – keep it real and the rest will follow.

So, really, what is our work in this life, the essence, the origin of our work? As Jesus says, our work is to "love one another as (he has) loved (us)." The reason we struggle with this is because it's too simple. It's so simple – our work is to love one another – that because it's too simple, we have to go and complicate it.

We think to be fulfilled in life, we have to have riches, but we don't. We don't need riches or fame or skyrocketing success or anything like that to fulfill our God-give role in life and to experience the joy and abundance that comes from it. But because it is so hard for us to resist the temptation of wanting it all – and when I say wanting it all, I mean wanting what the next guy has – because that is so tempting to us, we actually let it derail our first love in life when it comes to self-expression and joy.

Did you like to dance and sing as a child? Draw? Build things? Collect bugs? Unearth rocks? All of those are grownup jobs, but few people stick with it. Don't worry, it's still in you – whatever it was that really lit you up inside as a young person. If you haven't found a way to let it out, now's your chance! It's never too late. Reconnecting with that passion will bring joy to your heart and blessings to others. Being a blessing to others is God's desire for us. Jesus says, "You did not choose me but I chose you. And I appointed you to go and bear fruit, fruit that will last, so that the Father will give you whatever you ask him in my name."

² <http://money.cnn.com/2015/08/31/technology/minecraft-creator-tweets/>

Our greatest desire in all of life is available to us when we follow Jesus' lead. Trust me, he won't steer you wrong. Being steered wrong – that's what we do to ourselves and to each other, by chasing after something other than our God-given role or purpose.

Our God-given role is as Jesus said, "... to go and bear fruit, fruit that will last...." Fruit that will last is fruit that gets nurtured from one generation to the other. Don't let the struggles of this life get in the way of you contributing to the life of another person.

If each of us focused our lives on giving of ourselves for the betterment of others we would all come out on top, whatever that means you. After all, "on top" means something different to everyone. Everyone has a unique, God-given role in life. Our primary job is to discover and embrace our divine role and to help others to do the same.

The title of this sermon is "Loving Your Work." And yes, it is about loving what you do. But more than that, this title means that *loving is your work*. The role in life that God has chosen for you will be found in the way you show love to others, as a natural expression of who you are. It may not lead you to the easiest job in the world – Jesus never promised us an easy life, just one of abundance, fulfillment, and joy.

Over the next several weeks, we are going to look at ways we can discover and embrace our God-given role in life, and not only that, but ways to step into it boldly.

But first, we have to accept that what we are focused on now, what we are chasing after, who we are being now may or may not be who God calls us to be. Only you know that, for yourself. And, of course, we can all do a little better at being our best.

So for the next week, let's focus on ways we can express our best selves in love service another through the work that has been put in front of us. Nobody is perfect at this; everyone struggles.

But with God, we can all do it – put a little more love into the work we do or the role we have, in our jobs, or with our families, or out in our communities. More love in the world – that's our job this week, as individuals.

And then when we get back together next Sunday, we'll get down to the nitty gritty of what our current jobs and/or roles ask of us, and how we can get the best out of that.

Pastoral Prayer

O God, we confess there are times when we gather in prayer and we don't really understand why we do it, because we don't understand the "whys" of life.

At such times, our hearts are filled with sorrow at the magnitude of our losses and struggles.

Yet, we are grateful for the life of love that is ours. So even at times when our hearts are heavy, we find hidden blessings from you. Even when our pain is too deep for words, we experience the comfort of your presence.

When we come to you anxious and unsure, we are guided in the way forward. Our disbelief and restlessness gives way to faith and peace deep down in our souls.

So we ask now, O Lord, that you would help us to hold dear to at all times. For your love never lets go of us.

We pray all this in the name of He who is eternal – beyond time and space and without limitation – He who taught us to pray together, saying:

**Our Father, who art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name;
Thy kingdom come; Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread; And forgive us our debts as we
forgive our debtors.
And lead us not into temptation, But deliver us from evil,
For Thine is the Kingdom and the Power and the Glory forever.**

Amen.