

“God’s Job”
Psalm 146

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*Praise the Lord! Praise the Lord, O my soul!
I will praise the Lord as long as I live; I will sing praises to my God all my life long.
Do not put your trust in princes, in mortals, in whom there is no help.
When their breath departs, they return to the earth; on that very day their plans perish.
Happy are those whose help is the God of Jacob, whose hope is in the Lord their God,
who made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them; who keeps faith forever;
who executes justice for the oppressed; who gives food to the hungry. The Lord sets the
prisoners free;
the Lord opens the eyes of the blind. The Lord lifts up those who are bowed down; the Lord
loves the righteous.
The Lord watches over the strangers; he upholds the orphan and the widow, but the way of
the wicked he brings to ruin.
The Lord will reign forever, your God, O Zion, for all generations. Praise the Lord!*

Well, here we are – Labor Day weekend. School is back, and so these days find more than a few of us rushing around, carting kids from one thing to another.

In my former life as a middle school teacher, I always thought that Labor Day came a little too soon. That first weekend in September I was just getting started, and I always felt I could have used a 3-day weekend ‘round mid-October.

But here it is again: tomorrow. And like most holidays, it will come and go with scant reflection in our culture. Already I’ve seen a few ads for some local “Labor Day Sales,” which boggles the mind, frankly. It’s ironic: Apparently there are too many of us who can’t think of what to do with ourselves on a good day off other than shop, which means that there will be some who actually have to show up for work tomorrow so that the Labor Day sales can go on.

This Labor Day comes at an odd time in our country. Unemployment figures continue to roll in, though at a slower pace now than a few months ago. On average, Americans are working fewer hours than they were a year ago, as many employers have attempted to cut hours rather than jobs. Some need a break from the anxious labor of holding onto the job they already have while others need a break from the anxious labor of job-searching.

My hope and prayer is that wherever you find yourself tomorrow, you might be renewed in your labor, whatever it is—working or looking for work, parenting, grandparenting, being a student, caring for someone, receiving care...

The other day, I was doing what lots of pastors do—trolling through the Scriptures for some labor-related passage that might inspire. If you ask people what the Bible says about “work,” the one verse folks are apt to share, if any, is from Genesis, in the story of Adam and Eve, when God casts the humans out of the garden.

God says to Adam on that day, “Cursed is the ground because of you; in toil you shall eat of it all the days of your life... By the sweat of your brow you shall eat bread until you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; you are dust, and to dust you shall return.”

Kind of a bleak picture of work, isn't it? Sort of makes work sound like a chore—which in some cases, it is.

We've all done work that sustains us, and we've all done work that drains us. Some jobs are life-giving while others seem to suck the life right out of us. This passage from Genesis would seem to suggest that this is part of God's created order—that part of our God-given lot in life is to simply endure difficult work.

There are some who look at Genesis differently, however. Abraham Lincoln was among those who saw a moral imperative in Genesis 3:19. “By the sweat of *your brow* you shall eat bread” became part of his argument against slavery. The food you eat, Lincoln reasoned, is to be the result of your own work, not someone else's.

It's amazing, isn't it? Sometimes we use the Bible to maintain the status quo and sometimes we use the Bible to change it.

You can bet there were more than a few slave-owners in the South who answered Lincoln's charge with that quote from Ephesians: “Slaves, obey your masters.” Lincoln's response—and the response of a good many in the Church who would abolish slavery—was to look to Scripture as a whole and ask, “*But what is the nature of God?*”

Their answer took them to places like Psalm 146—a psalm that I sometimes think of as “God's Job Description.”

If you were ever trying to hire someone to do the work that God does, here's what you list under work responsibilities:

“A candidate for this position will execute justice for the oppressed, give food to the hungry, and set the prisoners free. He or she will also open the eyes of the blind and lift up those who are bowed down. Preference will be given to a candidate who loves the righteous. Experience watching over strangers and upholding the orphan and the widow also a plus.”

God's job description. And with it, we have a window to the heart of God and God's work among us. God, the psalmist writes, *essentially*, is in the business of loving justice for the slave, the worker, the unemployed, the outcast, the down-trodden. God is on your side!

And so, friends, this Labor Day, no matter what your labor has been these days, I will leave you with this. Psalm 146, verse 8: “The Lord lifts up those who are bowed down.”

What's been bowing you down lately? Your work? Your search for work? Your health? Your search for good health? What's been bowing you down? Anxiety? About money? Anxiety about security?

What trouble or what loss has you bowed down today? What weight have you been just struggling to carry?

I want you to know this: God *lifts up those who are bowed down*. It's part of God's job description.

Look for it.

Wait for it.

And may we, as a family of faith be about the business of God's good labor. Amen!