

Dirty Jobs

WEEKLY BIBLE STUDY

3rd in a four-part series

August 26, 2018

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Matthew 28:19–20 (CEB)

¹⁹Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰teaching them to obey everything that I've commanded you. Look, I myself will be with you every day until the end of this present age."

Acts 6:1–4 (CEB)

About that time, while the number of disciples continued to increase, a complaint arose. Greek-speaking disciples accused the Aramaic-speaking disciples because their widows were being overlooked in the daily food service. ²The Twelve called a meeting of all the disciples and said, "It isn't right for us to set aside proclamation of God's word in order to serve tables. ³Brothers and sisters, carefully choose seven well-respected men from among you. They must be well-respected and endowed by the Spirit with exceptional wisdom. We will put them in charge of this concern. ⁴As for us, we will devote ourselves to prayer and the service of proclaiming the word."

Galatians 6:10 (CEB)

¹⁰So then, let's work for the good of all whenever we have an opportunity, and especially for those in the household of faith.

1 Thessalonians 4:11–12 (CEB)

¹¹Aim to live quietly, mind your own business, and earn your own living, just as I told you. ¹²That way you'll behave appropriately toward outsiders, and you won't be in need.

2 Thessalonians 3:10 (CEB)

¹⁰Even when we were with you we were giving you this command: "If anyone doesn't want to work, they shouldn't eat."

*God has called each of us to work for his purposes,
not merely our own, even if that means getting our hands dirty.*

And so we, the people of St. Andrew, break ground yet again, this time on Phase Two of the ChurchOne master plan. We live in a dynamic world; nothing stays the same. Churches like other organizations either grow and decline; no church stays locked in stasis. So . . . growth it is. God has given us a mission and the means to accomplish it, both our own resources and abilities, but also the Holy Spirit, who guides and directs and strengthens us in all this.

Over the past two weeks, we've looked at work, seeing that it was given by God to the humans at the very beginning, before things went tragically awry. Adam and Eve lived in a beautiful garden and were expected to get their hands dirty in the work of tending the garden and, generally, mastering the wildness of God's good creation. The garden's soil is soft and fertile. I imagine it to have been like one big bug-free, disease-free Miracle-Gro commercial; even I might have had a green thumb there.

But when they rebelled against God, work became hard and even life-destroying. My own concrete-like weed-laden soil is a distortion of God's creation, a distortion intertwined with the distortion of my own relationship with God. Nonetheless, God has called us to his work and given us his Holy Spirit to encourage, empower, and sustain us. That is what we are about this weekend, putting shovel into soil and beginning the hard work of readying ourselves to invite and welcome more and more people to the body of Christ.

Working the mission

Read the above verses from Matthew, which is often called the Great Commission. Three verbs: make, baptize, and teach. Now, there might not be much labor involved in baptizing, but “make” and “teach”? Both imply a lot of real work, hard work, tiring work that involves us all.

And we are all commissioned to not only help people new to the faith begin a life of discipleship, we must help one another one to grow, to become ever-truer disciples of our Lord. This is not only the work of clergy and staff; it is the work of us all and it often requires us to take on a dirty and messy job.

Real work

I’ve included several New Testament passages that speak to work, including the story from Acts of the needed delegation of work in the community of believers. You can bet there were a lot of “dirty jobs” to be done.

The Great Commission

The Book of Acts tells the story, in part, of how this commission was carried out in the first 30 years after Jesus. Jesus was crucified and resurrected in 30AD or so. About three years later, Saul, a zealous Pharisee who was present at the martyring of Stephen, was on his way to Damascus to round up more Christians. While on the road to Damascus, Saul was visited by Jesus, transformed, and would thereafter be known as Paul, the great missionary to the Gentiles.

For the next thirty years, Paul traveled throughout the eastern Mediterranean founding new churches, making disciples, teaching and baptizing. The Book of Acts tells us how the invitation to follow Christ was taken by Paul and others to much of the Roman Empire, even to Rome itself.

The people of God are charged with inviting everyone, in all places, at all times, to accept Jesus’ invitation and enter the covenant community of God’s people. As Jesus so neatly put it in his Sermon on the Mount, “You are the light of the world. A city built on a hill cannot be hid. . . . let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven” (Matthew 5:14-16). We are to be that light, drawing the world to Jesus Christ.

As you look over the passages above, you will notice that some seem to speak to our work in building for God’s kingdom and others of our “real world” work, making a living . . . that sort of thing. We tend to separate the two and I’m not sure we should. Paul was a tentmaker by trade and took some pride in the fact that he supported himself as he evangelized for Jesus. It is a fair bet that much of Paul’s mission was accomplished in the day-to-day work of making leather and canvas goods for customers.

Too many people are burdened by a life filled with work that is frustrating, mundane, even dehumanizing. Too often, this is made worse, not better, by our co-workers. Perhaps they work out of fear of what will happen to them if they don’t keep showing up at their job or their inability to find a better job. They know that there must be something else. Something new. Something that will bring passion and satisfaction. But fear holds them back.

I don’t believe that God has planned out each step of our lives, such that all we have to do is trust God and wait for the next place that God will take us. But I do believe that God works with all our ambitions, decisions, troubles, and mistakes to move us forward toward God’s purposes for us.

If you are in a mundane job, you might ask yourself how it could be preparing you for the work you believe you should be doing. What can you learn now? How might God use this job to make you ready for the work you want to do? You might even ask yourself how you can find God’s presence and encouragement in the work you do now.

Finally, I’ve always been struck by the fact that Paul closes his great chapter on the resurrection, 1 Corinthians 15, with a “therefore.” He writes,

that because we shall all be raised just as Jesus was raised, our work is not in vain. Paul means that because we know the entire human enterprise is headed for a glorious, God-created restoration, all that we do now has meaning and purpose. We are not just passing time, waiting for the end. Instead, in all our work, dirty as it may be at times, we are building for God's kingdom, we are helping to ready the world for God's great burst of new creation, a new creation already begun in Jesus Christ.

Daily Bible Readings

This week: More on work (and Sabbath)

Monday, Amos 8:1-6 The Lord warns those who wish the Sabbath to be over so they can get back to work (v.5)!

Tuesday, Luke 13:10-21 Jesus heals on the Sabbath and tells parables about the Kingdom of God.

Wednesday, Acts 18:1-4 Paul arrives in Corinth and sets up his business. He is a tentmaker and supports himself with the work of his hands.

Thursday, 1 Corinthians 3:10-15 How well will our work stand up under scrutiny?

Friday, 2 Thessalonians 3 Paul's work is to be a model for the others. None are to be idle.

Saturday, James 4:13-17 All of our work, our dreams, our ambitions must all be lived out in the day-to-day presence of God.

Scott Engle's Bible Classes

Monday Evening Class

We are studying the book of Acts.

Meets from 7:00 to 8:15 in Piro Hall

Tuesday Lunchtime Class

We are studying the story of 1 Thessalonians.

Meets from 11:45 to 1:00 in Piro Hall

About the weekday classes:

Join us whenever you can. Each week's lesson stands on its own. This is very "drop-in." Bring something to eat if you like. Bring a study Bible.

On occasion Scott must cancel class, so if you are coming for the first time, you can check www.scottengle.org to make sure the class is meeting.

Scott's 10:50 Sunday Class in Smith Worship Center

This is a large, lecture-oriented class open to all ages.

Our current series: *Paul: A biography*. A fresh look at the life and ministry of Paul.