Hi,

I hope you are able to take advantage of this cooler weather. I had planned to walk this morning, but the rain nixed that idea . . . not that I’m complaining about rain. Today’s updates:

* My 3pm Monday class on Matthew and my noon Tuesday class on Genesis will meet this week, both on [my Facebook page](https://www.facebook.com/scottengle).
* The links to my on-line classes, the video recordings of the classes, the class audio podcasts, and the archive of these daily emails can all be found at [www.scottengle.org](http://scottengle.org/scotts-weekly-classes/). All the postings are up-to-date.

The past week or so, we’ve been talking about having a hope-filled vision for our lives, an all-encompassing vision that touches every aspect of our lives. Our relationship with God. Our relationship with others. Our finances. Our health. And now, our work. Craig Groeschel helpfully differentiates between our *life’s work* and our *work life*. Our life’s work is to grow into ever-truer disciples of Jesus Christ so that we may truly be the light to the world, so that we may make more disciples of Jesus Christ, and so that we may build for the kingdom of God.

But, today, we are going to focus more on our work life, what we do with those productive, waking hours that make up so much of our life. It is intriguing that the first biblical reference to humanity’s work isn’t an elevated discussion of our life’s work, but to the seemingly mundane task of working a garden.

***Genesis 2:1-3, 15 (NRSV)***

**Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all their multitude. And on the seventh day God finished the work that he had done, and he rested on the seventh day from all the work that he had done. So God blessed the seventh day and hallowed it, because on it God rested from all the work that he had done in creation.**

**The Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to till it and keep it.**

***1 Corinthians 15:54-58 (NRSV)***

**When this perishable body puts on imperishability, and this mortal body puts on immortality, then the saying that is written will be fulfilled:**

**“Death has been swallowed up in victory.”**

**“Where, O death, is your victory?**

 **Where, O death, is your sting?”**

**The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. 57But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.**

**Therefore, my beloved, be steadfast, immovable, always excelling in the work of the Lord, because you know that in the Lord your labor is not in vain.**

***Colossians 3:23-24 (The Message)***

**Work from the heart for your real Master, for God, confident that you’ll get paid in full when you come into your inheritance. Keep in mind always that the ultimate Master you’re serving is Christ.**

*The garden*

Whenever we come to the subject of work, it is always surprises people that work, much less working a garden, was part of the creation *before* Adam and Eve rebelled against God. Work can be so difficult and crushing for some people that it seems as if that is all work was ever meant to be. But in the story of the Garden of Eden, the work becomes difficult only after the humans’ wreck things by doing the one thing God asked them not to do. Only then does the soil in the garden become hard to break and till. Only then do weeds grow. Only then do Adam and Eve find out what it is like to become a Texas gardener!

But before their rebellion, the garden’s soil is soft and fertile. I imagine it to be like one big bug-free, disease-free Miracle-Gro commercial. Even I might have a green thumb there! 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.

It is the same with the work lives of far too many people. Their work lives are a distortion of God’s intent. They 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.

*“Celebrate and elevate”*

Yet, some people are confident that they are doing the work that God wants them to do. Count me among them. I’ve had great jobs in the past and some that were soul-crushing. I’ve been very privileged and blessed in some of the places and people to which my work life has taken me. But at St. Andrew, I find myself doing important work that I enjoy with people who are giving and encouraging in all things.

In fact, I’m sure that I’m doing what God wants me to do. You may feel the same way about your own work life. If so, “what now?” we might ask. If we are living the dream, take the time to enjoy it. Thank God for it. Celebrate. But also push onward. Don’t settle. Ask God, “What’s next?”

*“Meaning in the mundane”*

Still, many people know that they are not doing the work God wants them to do. They know that there must be something else. Something new. Something that will bring passion and satisfaction. Groeschle’s advice to such is people is (1) don’t panic and (2) trust God.

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. In my own case, it is pretty hard to see what much of my previous career has to do with my work at St. Andrew. Yet, I believe that God has used it all to shape me into the person and teacher that I am now.

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 God wants you to do? You might even ask yourself how you can find God’s presence and encouragement in the work you do now. Brother Lawrence found God’s presence in the mundane task of washing dishes. Brother Lawrence was a 17th century monk whose writings about practicing the presence of God are still widely read and appreciated. Brother Lawrence found that every task can be a medium of God’s love, even his dishwashing. Though he retreated from the world to find union with God, there is still an enduring word for us all. God is present with us in all things. His grace and love can be found in all things and all tasks. In his kitchen Brother Lawrence wrote, “We can do little things for God; I turn the cake that is frying on the pan for love of him, and that done, if there is nothing else to call me, I prostrate myself in worship before him, who has given me grace to work; afterwards I rise happier than a king. It is enough for me to pick up but a straw from the ground for the love of God."

*Therefore . . . our work, all of it, is not in vain*

I’ve always been struck by the fact that Paul closes his great chapter on the resurrection with a “therefore.” He writes, 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, whatever that might be. Instead, in all our work 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.

*Working from the heart*

If you read today’s passage from Colossians closely, you might be able to infer that it comes from a passage written to those in the Christian community in Colossae who were slaves. The passage is from one of the many “household codes” that we find in Paul’s letters. Such codes were common in the Greco-Roman world and spelled out how the members of the households were to conduct themselves. There was advice for the husbands and fathers, for the wives and mothers, for the children, and even for the slaves. Ownership of slaves was taken for granted in the Greco-Roman world and was common to wealthier households.

Here, Paul urges that the slaves understand that all the work they do is work for their real Master, Jesus. Their work may be mundane, unimportant, and not of their choosing. But they are to work from the heart, endeavoring to work well and with love. The sacred was not to be a separate category in their lives, nor in ours. The sacred pervades every corner of our lives. We are to acknowledge that truth and, like Brother Lawrence and his dishes, affirm as God’s even the most ordinary of tasks. For in this, we unify our work life with our life’s work and get a foretaste of the kingdom of God.

*A bit more -- Genesis*

Genesis is the first book of the Bible and it is foundational to all that follows. In it, we learn that there is a God who created everything and created humans in God’s image. We learn that God gave the humans a beautiful place to live and to work, a place in which their relationship with God could thrive. But we also learn that, in their desire to be like gods themselves, the humans tossed all this away, doing the one thing God had asked them not to do. Through this act of selfish defiance, the humans’ relationship with God was deeply mangled and, indeed, all of creation became misshapen, only a shadow of what God intended. All of this happens in the first three chapters of Genesis!

The rest of the Bible is the story of God’s efforts to make things right, to restore creation, and to bring humans back into a right relationship with their creator – our creator.

The story of Noah is really a story of “uncreation” and new creation, a fresh start. But this start goes wrong too. No sooner do the humans get off the ark then they begin building for themselves a tower that would reach to the heavens. Again, they would seek to be like gods. So God dashes the tower to the ground and scatters the people, even going so far as to burden them with a multitude of languages.

So . . . in the 12th chapter of Genesis, we learn that God undertook a new way forward, ever determined that his people would be restored to a right and loving relationship with God. We meet Abram, later called Abraham, the man God chooses to be the father of a people, God’s people, through whom God would put things right. As Genesis unfolds, we meet Abraham, his wife, Sarah, their sons, Isaac and Esau, and Isaac’s son, Jacob. Jacob, in turn, has twelve sons, from whom would come the twelve tribes of Israel. And, of course, the story of this restoration reaches its climax in Jesus Christ who, as Israel’s representative king, would do for Israel what the people were unable to do for themselves.

‘til tomorrow, grace and peace,

Scott