

Sermon September 2, 2018
Labor Day
Rev. Mark Moline

"I have seen the business that God has given to everyone to be busy with." This Labor Day Week-end we can proclaim that passage from Ecclesiastes with new understanding and appreciation, having blessed just a few of the tools and tokens of our individual labor.

I hope you all share in my amazement at the wide-ranging careers represented here. There must surely be countless folks out there somewhere, whose lives were positively impacted by your hard work.

Back to Ecclesiastes, "What gains have the workers from their toil? I know there is nothing better for them than to be happy, and enjoy themselves as long as they live; moreover, it is God's gift - (let me repeat that) it is God's Gift -- that all should eat and drink and take pleasure in their toil."

"Take pleasure in your work!" This Hebrew Testament concept of finding pleasure in one's work almost went by the by with the industrial revolution.

Henry Ford was one of the first to apply standardization and assembly line manufacturing to mass production. And it revolutionized industrial production throughout the world. In all fairness to Henry, he probably never intended his assembly line mindset to reach beyond industrial production, but it has. It has silently crept into almost every other aspect of our lives. And as such, we are

driven to a never-ending quest for better and greater efficiency. Such has greatly detracted from our relationship with, and love for one another. Doing more with less has taken precedence over just doing with others.

Early in the 1980's Judy and I and the kids left Washington DC and moved to western North Dakota - there on the edge of the badlands. That was like stepping back in time. There were more Episcopalians in our parish in suburban Washington than in the whole Episcopal Diocese of North Dakota.

Our daughter Rebecca was in the first grade, and in the Washington suburbs she attended a giant elementary school with far more students than my high school. Her teacher and her counsellor had examination scores to show that she was experiencing serious academic problems.

There was even mention of a possible learning disability.

In North Dakota we found the schools in town were filled beyond capacity, and so they sent Rebecca out to Marmott-Sunny School which was located on a dusty dirt road about ten miles out of town.

Marmott Sunny was literally a small two room school house. Two classrooms and bathrooms and that was it. It had no cafeteria, and no administrative offices - I guess because it had no administrators, no principal, no counsellor, no school nurse, no clerks or receptionists. Just two classrooms and two teachers. Grades 1 through 3 were in one room and the fourth through the sixth were in the other room.

Naturally Judy and I were concerned about Rebecca, especially in light of the problems she had encountered back east in that large school plant. But Rebecca loved her new school primarily because horses would wander onto the playground during recess. North Dakotans don't like fences.

On her third day at Marmott-Sunny Rebecca came home with a note from her teacher. It said simply, "Take Rebecca to an Optometrist. She needs glasses."

In short order, Rebecca had her glasses and became an outstanding student once she could actually see the letters and numbers.

Her North Dakota teacher didn't have computerized test scores on which she could evaluate Rebecca, but she did have Rebecca. She had Rebecca to observe and listen to, and she had her love for her students.

How about our work, our gifts to God of our labor given in return for his gifts to us. Are those gifts still a labor of love? Or have individual creativity, pride and passion for our work been sacrificed in the interest of often self-imposed standards of efficiency?

St. Paul writes in his first letter to the church at Corinth, about our life's foundation being Christ - and says, "Each builder must choose with care how to build on that foundation. The work of each builder will become visible."

It is difficult to have passion for a work in which you and your contribution become invisible. I suspect we can only love our work if we can personally identify

with it, if we can take it personally and spiritually. If we truly consider it a gift from God.

As believers, Christ is the foundation of our life. We must individually build upon that foundation as we are gifted by God and as best we can through our own work, love and ministry to others

Your hard work has value to the Father and will not go unnoticed. How you build your life on the foundation of Christ will be made visible. We can still find God given pleasure in our work.