

Come Away and Rest Awhile

A sermon preached by Ted Atkinson, Minister, Oxford Presbyterian Church, Oxford, PA on the 16th Sunday in Ordinary Time, July 17, 1994. Scripture Lessons: 2 Samuel 7:1-14a; Psalm 89:20-37; Ephesians 2:11-22; Mark 6:30-34, 53-56.

IN THE NAME OF THE FATHER AND OF THE SON AND OF THE HOLY SPIRIT. AMEN.

My dad was a worker, a Union man, a laborer. For him, work meant physical work, work which got you greasy and dirty and calloused your hands (I didn't inherit that part of his work ethic). He believed that people who work at a desk or who earn money thinking, don't really work. "God told us to work by the sweat of our brow, not by the seat of our pants," he'd say.

"Six days shalt thou labor, and do all thy work". He obeyed that literally. He worked six days a week, not five, and he opposed the union efforts to shorten the work week. In the 1920s and '30s he shoveled coal on steam engines. In the forties and fifties, he was a locomotive engineer on the Pennsylvania Railroad. He rarely took vacations except to paint the house or make major repairs. When he wasn't getting paid for his work, he was planting a garden, repairing our house, or fixing the clunker of a car he owned which was always breaking down. After he retired from the railroad, he continued to go to the "round house" in Wilmington and beg the locomotive engineers to let him take a train for them.

My dad was a hard worker but I can't remember that he ever worked on Sunday - unless there was an emergency such as a train wreck. He never worked on Sunday even though the railroad paid time and a half. He told me that the Union insisted on higher pay on Sunday to discourage unnecessary Sunday work, so that workers could rest. He ^{got irritated} ~~expressed his irritation~~ with workers who preferred to work on Sunday just to make extra money. He wasn't a sabbatarian. He realised

that some people have to work on Sunday; doctors and nurses as well as railroad engineers and fireman and brakeman. He never ^{heard him} criticised anybody for working on Sunday. But he ^{wasn't going to,} ~~knew that he didn't have to work on Sunday. He could live without the extra money.~~

What kind of attitude to work ^{and rest} do you have? Look for a moment at your daily routine. In general, we're all very busy people. Retired people say, "I'm busier now than I've ever been. I don't have time to do all I want." Teenagers - up before 6 a.m. during the school year, a hurried breakfast and off to school. After school there's soccer, basketball, and other activities. In the evening, homework and household chores. On the weekends, Sunday School, worship, youth group.

All of us have meetings to attend, people to visit, volunteer work to do, telephone calls to make, forms to fill out. Our days and weeks are filled with engagements and our years filled with plans and projects. Even George Burns, in his nineties, is booked up through his 100th birthday. There's seldom a time when we don't know what to do. But sometimes we move through life in such a distracted way - moving from commitment to commitment, crisis to crisis, from one urgent demand to another. Many of us feel guilty when we don't have our schedules filled. Some of us even lie so that our friends will think we're busier than we really are.

I was reading someplace that one of the leading causes of work related accidents is sleep deficit. Think of how dangerous this can be. Truck drivers on the road for twenty hours at a time. ^{without rest} Airline pilots working around the clock for

two days straight. Doctors and nurses working without adequate ^{rest} ~~sleep,~~
administering medication and performing surgery, ~~without proper sleep and rest.~~

It would be interesting to know how many of us have two jobs. You have a regular, forty hour a week job, plus a part time or even a full time job. If you're in business for yourself you probably work at least 60 hours a week with all the hassle of getting replacements when someone calls in sick, payrolls to meet, forms to fill out.

How did we get this way? How did we get to the place where work, for some of us, has become a compulsion. Some people blame the Presbyterian Church! That's right! Some people blame John Calvin for the so called Calvinistic work ethic. He ministered in Geneva, Switzerland in the 1500s and was the most influential Presbyterian theologian. Calvin believed that the Bible taught that work has positive value. God calls everybody ^{not just ministers} to serve and glorify him in our work. The Bible makes no distinction between "full time Christian service" and "regular, secular" work. All lawful work that contributes to the welfare of the community is service to the Lord. Farmers, artisans, artists, composers, factory workers all are called to serve God in and through their work. We work in obedience to the law of God who commands us to love our neighbor.

But our ultimate purpose in life is not found in work. ^{Calvin taught} Our ultimate purpose ^{we've forgotten that part of our Presbyterian heritage} is found in worship - in worshiping the living God.¹ When we come away from the work day world and rest awhile with the risen Christ on Sunday, the meaning of our work is put in perspective. Our work is meant to lead us to worship God.

Whenever work doesn't lead us to worship, our work loses its purpose and becomes a curse. Work that doesn't lead to worship becomes a form of idolatry. We end up worshipping our work or ourselves rather than ~~the Creator~~. *God who has come to us in J.*

What we have today is a secularized Calvinistic work ethic. We have a work ethic which is divorced from worship, divorced from God. We have a work ethic in which we find meaning, not in serving God and loving neighbor, but in making more money. A secularized work ethic leads us to say things like, "How much do you think she's worth?" Meaning - how much money does she have, how much does she make? A secularized work ethic places great value on the prestige of being a doctor or a lawyer, and devalues and dehumanizes the person who shovels coal, drives a truck or works on an assembly line. A secularized work ethic leads us to ask people, upon first meeting them, "What do you do?" rather than discovering who they are.

When we divorce our work from the worship of God who is known through the living Christ ~~we work for the wrong reasons.~~ ~~When we divorce work from worship we work~~ *end up working* two or three jobs, not because inflation requires that we work so much, but because we have an inflated view of what we need ~~to buy~~ in order to make life meaningful. *Without God in our lives, we make a futile attempt to accumulate things money can buy.*

When we divorce our work from the worship of God who is known through the living Christ we work in ~~an~~ *a vain* attempt to justify ourselves ^{to ourselves} before God. We think that our work shows God that we're good people. Surely God will notice how hard and long we work and will reward us with good things. But we often don't realize

that our work ^{can} ~~is~~ actually leading ~~ing~~ us away from God, leading ~~ing~~ us away from worship, leading ~~ing~~ us away from recognizing that we're justified freely by God's grace, through faith in what Christ has done for us, apart from our works.

When we divorce our work from the worship of God who is known through the living Christ we work in a vain effort to prove our worth to our families. But the work which is supposed to make us a good, responsible husband, wife or parent often takes so much time that we neglect our family. In fact, we might end up working two or three jobs as a way to escape an unhappy marriage, and the responsibilities of family.

When we divorce our work from the worship of God who is known through the risen Christ our work ~~actually~~ leads to self righteousness. ^{we begin to think we are morally superior to people who don't work.} We work in an effort to show that we're morally superior to people who don't work, who can't work, or who won't work.

In our Gospel lesson, Jesus led the twelve apostles out to a deserted place to rest awhile. The apostles had just returned from work. They had just returned from a mission Jesus had given them - to cast out demons, to preach, teach and heal. They were eager to share with Jesus all they had done and taught. Then, because so many people were coming and going that they did not even have a chance to eat, Jesus said to them, "Come with me by yourselves to a quiet place and get some rest."

The Risen Christ says to us this morning who have come from hectic work schedules, "Come with me. Spend time with me. Come away to this quiet place,

this sanctuary, and rest. Come unto me all ye that are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest." When we come away and rest awhile with the Lord on the Lord's Day we remember that Christ is truly risen from the dead. Christ is alive. Christ is with us here and now.

When we come away and rest awhile with the Lord on the Lord's day we remind ourselves that we're justify freely, apart from our works; justified freely by God's grace which we accept through faith in Christ.

When we come away and rest awhile with the Lord on the Lord's day we renew our relationship with the Creator of the universe whom we know through Christ. We remember that God worked six days to create the heavens and the earth and that God rested on the seventh day.

When we come away and rest awhile with the Lord on the Lord's day we return to our work with an increased ability to see our neighbors with compassion and with a renewed energy to work for the good and welfare of our neighbors.

It would be funny if it weren't so tragic to hear a person say, "I don't have time to worship God, I have too much work to do." God gives us our our time, all of our time. Sunday is the day the Risen Christ invites his people to come away with him and rest awhile.

Let us pray: O God, give us times of refreshment and peace in the course of this busy life. Grant that we may so use our leisure to rebuild our bodies and renew our minds, that our spirits may be opened to the goodness of your creation; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.