

The Church in the Valley: Work for the Lord
a message based on
Colossians 3:22-4:6

Followers of Jesus:

For many people this weekend called “the Labour Day weekend” is about one last time to get away with family before IT all begins again: school, work, and all the other busy things we get ourselves into. It's just another day of rest. It's simply a time when we don't have to work. That's not how it all started, however. Laura Johnson of Cupe 727 writes about the origins of the labour movement in the Port Alberni online newspaper, AlberniPortal.ca. It started in the 1870s in Toronto, a demonstration for workers, to protest the imprisonment of some 24 leaders in labour who went on strike to ensure a 9-hour work day. In those days it was a crime to belong to a labour union. What I find interesting about reading about these sorts of things, the impression is often given that labour as we know it today is all due to efforts of unions.

I have news for you: labour – work in all its forms – is God's idea, his creation. The first book of the Bible tells how it happened.

The LORD God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it (Gen 2:15).

The thought of creation is expressed in this book we've been studying this summer, this letter to the church in the valley: Colosse, Laodicea, and Hierapolis. What does Paul say about the creation?

For by him [the Son of God] all things were created... all things were created by him and for him (Col 1:16).

Let's think about that for a moment. All things, everything that there is, visible or invisible were created by the Son of God, and for him. That is a significant word. Everything that exists is meant not primarily first of all for us, our children, our island, our province, our country, our world; it exists for the Son of God, for Jesus Christ our Lord! There is a problem, however, and it's huge. It goes well beyond a 9-hour work day, or – and here's a new idea presented recently by MacLean's magazine – a 4-day work week. The problem is described for us in our Contemporary Testimony.

**16. All spheres of life --
family and friendship,
work and worship,
school and state,**

**play and art --
bear the wounds of our rebellion.**

In other words, there is not only sin in us sometimes seemingly in complete control of our actions; there is sin in the big things of our society, like work and art and even friendship. Sin is a pandemic force in the world today! It gets into everything!

What can we do about it? It's not what we do so much as our response to what God has done. What has he done?

For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, and through him to reconcile to himself all things... by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross (Col 1:19f).

All things. That includes every aspect of our lives today as we know it. It means work in all its forms: whether it be in the home, as a volunteer at the Thrift Store or the Cowichan Valley Food Basket, on the job site working construction, in the office, in the milking parlour; in the school, at the university or community college. There's a verse in the Old Testament that describes it well.

A person can do nothing better than to eat and drink and find satisfaction in their work. This too, I see, is from the hand of God, for without him, who can eat or find enjoyment? (Eccles 2:24).

Or, as our Contemporary Testimony puts it:

**48. Our work is a calling from God.
We work for more than wages
and manage for more than profit
so that mutual respect
and the just use of goods and skills
may shape the workplace.
While we earn or profit,
we love our neighbors by providing
useful products and services.**

I don't know if we realize this, but what I'm saying is radically counter to the society in which we live. Isn't it true that our society believes that life is basically divided up into two categories? The one we might say is called "public" life, secular, stuff that has nothing to do with God; the other we might call private or "spiritual" in nature. Do you want to be spiritual? Keep your spiritually way in the back of the room, in the back seat, in the smallest corner over there. Keep your religion out of your

public life! Do we realize what the Bible is saying here? It is saying that life is religion; life is spiritual in nature; no part of life can be said as not being connected to Christ and his life living inside of us.

Neal Plantinga puts it like this: the calling of Jesus, the Son of God, before he became a teaching/preacher/Rabbi was to be a carpenter in Galilee. While Jesus was building cabinets and door frames, he was building the kingdom. To put it a different way: God may be calling you to preach the word from Sunday to Sunday; but he may also be calling you to plant corn. The one is not better than the other; just different. But that gets us to the question of motives for the work we do. Why do we work? Again the society we live in will say, "It's a living," or, "It puts food on the table," or, "It's a job, and somebody's got to do it."

How about this for an answer? In my work, I work for the Lord.

Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for people... It is the Lord Christ you are serving (Col 3:23, 24).

Or, as was written earlier in the letter:

And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him (Col 3:17).

Someone could come into our homes and say, "I represent so-and-so company, and I would like to sell you something from that company because I think their products are excellent." Do we realize that as followers of Jesus we don't first of all represent ourselves, or our families, or our church: we represent Jesus! Do we know that when it comes to the way we conduct business, it's not just our reputation that is at stake? It's the reputation of Jesus! If we are the boss, how do we represent Jesus well? If we are often yelling at our employees, whose reputation are we really sullyng? If we own a business and our number one goal is to make the most money possible; what does that tell others about Jesus?

Some people may not know anything about God or Jesus or the church; but when they see us, they'll catch a glimpse as to who Jesus is or what the church is about – and they'll do it without our saying a word to them. You know, the media today does a really good job of showing other people that the church is made up of nothing but hypocrites and people who are "against" all sorts of things. Whenever there's a story about the church that leans that way, they'll print it or tell it on their newscast. Will we show, by the way we conduct business, that the church is not about people who are judgemental? Will our behavior show that Jesus is truly making an impact on our lives,

that he has more say than the dollar, or the delivery date?

When we first believed, Christ came to live inside of us to teach us the rhythm of death and resurrection, the circle of stripping off and putting on, the method of putting to death and coming to life through his life in us. I realize that what I'm talking about here is not easy. We can't be perfect at any time, and we shouldn't try to be perfectionistic in our work either. We should strive for excellence as Jesus enables us. And when we make a mistake, we shouldn't try to cover it up, but be honest about it and admit it.

So we do what the boss tells us, not because then he'll pay us our wages but because we're not really working for him; we're working for the Lord. We work hard at all times, even when the teacher isn't looking to see if we're doing what she asked us to; because we're not working to get a good grade so much, as we're working for the Lord.

Whatever work we do, though, we do for the Lord; we do to make the world a better place. And, because we are working for the Lord and representing him, we need to stay alert and aware. Alert for what? Aware of what?

Be wise in the way you act toward outsiders; make the most of every opportunity (Col 4:5).

Are we getting the impression that Jesus is all about wisdom? When we are given wisdom (it is a gift given from the Giver of every good and perfect gift), we'll know just what to say, when to say it (and when to stay quiet). When we're given the opportunity to tell what we believe, it can be in a moment, in a flash, and we'll only have a little slot to fit a word in; so stay alert to the possibility, and pray for that opportunity. Be ready to turn any ordinary topic of conversation into spiritual conversation. (check out how Jesus does that in John 4). And be aware that what we say can have a preserving element to it: it'll keep things on the up-and-up; and it'll keep the conversation on things that are good to think about, not what tears apart.

At the beginning of this letter to the church in the valley, Paul gives a typical prayer report, what he's been praying for this church. At the end of his letter he brings up prayer again. He brings it up because prayer is the most important way of staying connected to Jesus. This is what I invite us to do now as we finish this series off. It's a prayer that is a responsive reading; yet it is still a prayer. Please pray with me and participate by calling out names of people you may know, or just pray quietly in your hearts; and say the prayer out loud together where indicated.

Leader: Let us pray.

Holy God, though this world depends on your grace,
it is governed and tended by mortals.

So we pray for those who walk the corridors of power
in the parliaments of this and other lands,
whose judgements we value or fear.

(Names may be said aloud)

May they always consider those they represent,
make decisions with courage and integrity,
and resist any temptation to abuse the trust placed in them.
Lord hear us.

All: LORD GRACIOUSLY HEAR US.

Leader: We pray for those who hold key positions
in the worlds of finance, business, agriculture and industry,
whose decisions may profit some or impoverish many.

(Names may be said aloud)

May they always value people higher than profit;
may they never impose burdens on the poor
which they would not carry themselves;
and may they never divorce money from morality
or ownership from stewardship.
Lord hear us.

All: LORD GRACIOUSLY HEAR US.

Leader: We pray for those in the caring professions,
who look after and listen to
kind, cruel and cantankerous folk,
and for those who make decisions
regarding the nation's health and welfare.

(Names may be said aloud)

May they always sense the sanctity of life
and every person's uniqueness;
may they help and heal
by their interest as well as their skill;
and may they be saved from tiredness
and an excess of demands.
Lord hear us.

All: LORD GRACIOUSLY HEAR US.

Leader: And let us remember
those for whom we are responsible
and to whom we are accountable
in what we do today and in the coming days.

(Names may be said aloud)

May we show them the thoughtfulness, openness
and kindness of Jesus.
Lord hear us.

All: LORD GRACIOUSLY HEAR US.

Leader: Lord, hear our prayers,
and if today we might be the means
by which you answer the prayers of others,
then may you find us
neither deaf nor defiant,
but keen to fulfill your purpose, for Jesus' sake.

All: AMEN.

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