

Sermon - Psalm 62:5-12 Mark 1:14-20 January 25, 2009

Beyond the Job – Life Calls

For God alone my soul waits. On God rests my deliverance and honor. Trust in God at all times. I love the psalmist's words. The faith that shines through them. Yes, it echoes the thought of the verse of Scripture right in the middle of the Bible. Psalm 118:8. I told you this amazing fact before - that there are 594 chapters in the Bible before Psalm 118 - and 594 chapters after Psalm 118 - there are 1188 chapters - in other words - psalm 118 – verse 8 - which reads - *It is better to take refuge in the Lord than to put confidence in mortals.*

Trust in God at all times. Yes. And that's what you and I are doing right now. By being here we're saying, life is about God first. And every Sunday, we try to set ourselves up for the rest of the week – living by God's word in God's world.

I am helped by the Psalmist's words – EXCEPT - Except the words at the end of the psalm. The Psalm ends – *For you repay all according to their work.* I've got to stop and think about those words.

On the one hand – that it good news. It tells me that terrorists and murderers, and Wall Street shysters and swindlers, and nasty neighbors and child abusers will be held accountable by God. And me , too.

But unless I understand that phrase right, I'll get things all wrong. Because - any good thing I do, my good works, work worthy of God's blessing, is a work I can only do by the strength God gives me. Paul said that – *I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.* And as long as I understand that I'll be okay. Before any job I have to do, after any and every work I've ever done, my strength, my hope, is not in what I do, but in who I am – whose I am.

It was what we tried to remind ourselves about two weeks ago in renewing our Baptism vows. Baptism declares who we are in God's sight. Certainly for a baby it's not about anything he or she has done... or will do.

And even for adults, Baptism is not about us as much as it is about what God does for us. For adults Baptism is about repentance - about turning our lives around, No longer looking at anything we've done - good or bad - but looking at what God does for us in Christ - giving us the promise of new forever life by God's grace.

Before any job I have to do, after every job I've ever done, my strength, my hope, is not in what I do, but in who I am - God's chosen and beloved person. I want us to remember this this morning – It's what the Gospel reading from Mark is about – its what the sermon is about – Beyond the Job - Life Calls.

My first title was – Out of Work – Deeper into Life.

And three things were and still are running through my mind when I put those words on paper. First – I thought about and have been thinking about people who are out of work – more people in our country and our Church family - than in 30 years – and I remember the 70's - when this Sanctuary was built.... In very stress full times - It seems we choose to build in just such times.

And - I think about the families and the effects those words – out of work – really represent.

Second – I realized – though in a very different way – that that is the story of my life very soon – Out of work – out of this job. This stuff is - hm - about me.

And third, is the truth of God's word. Life – the deepest meanings in life = are always always more than any job can ever give us. And sometimes, sometimes, it takes losing a job to really begin to understand this truth...

Not in the job, not through the job, but beyond any job is life's meaning.

But – that's surely not my prayer this morning, that any one lose their job. No - my prayer is for us to understand what life in Christ, as God's people –is about.

Please pray with me.... Lord of life, your love for us is forever. You love us not for what we do, but for who we – your forever children. And you call us first of all to live for You – and so to love you with all our heart and soul and mind and strength, and our neighbor as ourselves. May your word to us this day guide our living in this way – in Christ. Amen.

I hear the reports. I see the facts in the life of our Church... in the community - what the Church will be. New things need to happen. And we know that. It's why we've built the way we've built. To make a visible statement about this truth – We want to be open to God's world, to its beauty and wonder – and its needs. And also to be open, inviting, to offer people a way to understand what's happening in their lives and to draw near to the God who is at the heart of whatever life is or will be.

We want to be – as the Pastor Search Committee says – cutting edge traditional. We are not just a chapel on the lake where folks can meditate. We don't want to be a kind of fortress where we can teach and defend our kind of faith. We want to be a place open to the world – embracing its wonder – and inviting all to come to know the God of all wonder and of love.

We want to share the good news, the challenging good news of a God who calls us to be partners with God, co-workers with Christ, in seeing God's will done here on earth as it is in heaven. We want to help each other long for, and see and know and feel the deepest meaning in life. And – strangely – for the first 12 disciples of Jesus – all this began for them with a job loss.

They weren't fired – exactly – not quite like what has been happening in our community and country and world right now – saving money – or having no money – and so – job cuts. But be clear – for the first disciples – who changed the world – the first step was a job loss. That led to a career change – and for them – and us all – a new understanding of the meaning of life.

They were good faithful hard working folk, those first 12. Human – very human, and we know not all of them got the picture. But for all of them, new life, deeper richer life, began with - being out of a job.

John said it first - He proclaimed the good news. *The kingdom of God has come near – repent and believe the good news.* Repent – turn away from what you are now doing. That was John's message. And then Jesus effected the job change.

He saw Simon and his brother Andrew, fishing. And he said - Follow me, and I will make you fishers for people. And immediately they left their nets. Sounds like how some jobs are lost – Working one minute – walked out of the job the next.

And then the same thing happened with James and John – and eight more would hear and answer the same call. And in some way – so have we all. All who ever have said – Jesus Christ is my Lord and Savior.

We've said yes to a new way of life - to being - Fishers of people. How's that for a new job description? Leave what you're doing, what you know how to do, what defines who you are - fisherman. Leave it. Job gone. And you'll find a new career as fisher of people.

Hm? I don't know how that sounds to you, but it sounds just a bit like the lines I've heard, and others have told me they've heard – when the ax has fallen. You're fired, let go, down sized. You're out of the work you know best. Maybe the only work you know.

And someone says - Hey – cheer up – there is a new career just waiting for you. Trust me. A little training and you 'll be your way to a great pay day. Maybe - or maybe not. For sure - A lot easier said then done.

Stepping blindly into a new unknown future. Truth is that was the Psalmist's call - Trust God. In Psalm 62, and in Psalm 118 - *Better to trust in God then in mortals. God is my strength*

And the Apostle Paul did it. He had a little help your may remember. He was blinded – so he could see the truth. To Trust not in himself, but God. But - He was out of work – before he really understood the deepest meaning of life and the truest work he had to do - and – he changed the world.

But – can we. Can we see in this truly frightening time, the call of faith, the power of faith, the good news of God?

If life is the job, then life is way too small a thing. That is not to say - in any way that jobs are not important. That good jobs with good pay and health care and retirement - yes - retirement - should not be there for everyone. They should. It is the greatest challenge before President Obama. And - it is the way the work in the world gets done... jobs.

But - I am saying - God's word says - life is so much more than the job - And sometimes, sometimes, the job can keep us from seeing and living life to its fullest.

When all is said and done, and our hearts beat their last beat - what then? What happens then? What will all our work mean - then - if we have never considered the truer deeper more vital work we have to do in life - to Glorify God and Enjoy God - forever? What job - no matter how well we do it - offers that?

I've been aware again, of all the pain and struggle and fear and stress and strain that comes from job loss. Over the years we've hosted SOS - the homeless shelter here - I've heard truly tragic and troubling stories of what happens to some people, too many people, when there is no work. I've seen the strain in out of work people, and the pain and stress it can cause in their lives and the lives of those closest to them

Just the simple change in schedules - can be hard. That's something I know my wife is a bit worried about - with my job loss just ahead.... I've been here helping, I hope, to make things work here - a lot of energy and hours. And Mary is not sure she will need my energy and help to run the household she has managed very well - thank you.

Change - always challenging. And add the economic piece of job loss - and it can be shattering. And - and - it can - it can - on the other hand - it can open us, offer to us, a whole new understanding of who we really are. What really matters. What, yes, faith is all about.

Clearly - what happened with Jesus and those first disciples - was something quite different than job losses in a recession. But there is a truth in both situations that merits our attention.

Then, for those, and now for us, there is the same challenge to see and to count what really matters in life. And job loss, and other major life changes, can be dramatic calls to new life understanding.

I am struck by the popularity of 2 recent best selling books. Both of which touch on this theme. The Shack - and - The Last Lecture. Both of these stories really are adventures in faith. They deal with major losses in a person's life - losses that change everything and demand a new understanding of life's meaning. For one author it was the tragic loss of his daughter who was murdered - For the other it was his own death sentence from cancer.

They both needed to find deeper meaning in life than just getting by day after day - just punching the time clock, or earning the salary.

And I am struck by the motto of the American Disabled Veterans - *Their courage Endures*

Life events can bring irrevocable changes in our lives that demand some deeper understanding of what life is really about. A learning of a life lesson summed up in the phrase that has helped me try to live my life holding onto God more than anything else. *All desires in life shall fail, save the desire to be loved by God. All desires in life shall fail, save the desire to be loved by God.*

And some how – saying that brings to my inner ear the old miner’s song of lament.... 16 tons. I owe my soul to the company store. Sadly – yes - we often do. The job defines us – owns us. And until we can be set free from this ownership – we cannot be free to be what God intends us most to be.

Defined by, guided by, strengthened by, comforted by, blessed by – knowing that we are God’s beloved and forever children...and that nothing, nothing in life or death, can separate us from God’s love for us in Christ.

Sometimes, sometimes, it may take losing a job, to remember that we do not owe our souls to the company store. That there are more jobs for us to do, there is no lack of work to be done in making this world a better place to live. That in faith we can trust God to provide what we need - if not all that we may want.

And that the Measure of our lives will be forever – based not on whether or not we did some job, or the status we achieved – or the production quotas we met - but whether we did learn some ways – every day – to love God, and to love our neighbors.

Be clear - I pray every day – and try to do what I can - for new jobs for those who have lost theirs. I pray God’s presence and grace and care in the very anxious time job loss brings. And I pray that in this terribly tough and punishing time – right now – the knowledge of God’s love for us will be strength for us - to not only endure this troubled time, but to grow through it to a new understanding of who we are - not defined by any job -

But by God’s call to us to be God’s people, and by the faithfulness of our living, to be – yes – employed always - as witnesses for Christ - as fishers of persons - bringing them, too, to a deeper understanding of life as finally, a journey we run, from God to God. Yes – beyond any job - life calls.... Help us Lord, to say, Yes. Amen.

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