

Holy Ground All Around

Exodus 3:1-15

Certain holidays that we celebrate are easily associated with matters of faith.

Christmas, Easter, and Thanksgiving, to name a few. Pretty much, Labor Day is not that kind of holiday.

Maybe it should be.

One reason that it isn't is that labor and commerce are considered to be secular matters.

But it wasn't always so.

For centuries, what came to be known as the Protestant Work Ethic gave people a sense that what they did to make a living profited not just the individual, but also provided for someone else's real needs or contributed to the betterment of society as a whole.

A person's secular occupation, no matter what it looked like, could actually be an avenue for living one's faith in the world.

Take the story we just read about Moses being called by God to deliver the Hebrew people from slavery in Egypt.

What was he doing when God spoke to him from a burning bush?

It says in verse one, "Moses was keeping the flock of his father-in-law Jethro, the priest of Midian; he led his flock beyond the wilderness and came to Horeb, the mountain of God."

That's when all the flashy stuff happens, that people remember.

But what was Moses doing when he stepped into the middle of a miracle?

He was just doing his job. Tending his father-in-law's flock. It was just another day at the office, one more hour on the time-clock, like so many others before it.

He wasn't in a temple or at a shrine when he heard God call. He wasn't meditating or offering sacrifices. Just ... walking the dusty trail, working for his supper. Until the curious sight of the burning bush grabbed his attention and a voice from heaven commanded him to remove his sandals for the place where he was doing his daily tasks ... was Holy ground.

Moses seems to have been greatly surprised by this revelation ... as you or I might be.

Can you imagine showing up at the office, or the barn, or the cash register; or wherever it is that you put in your 9-5, and getting a memo that you are standing on sacred ground?

Not because there was something especially holy about the workplace itself, but that it was rendered holy ground because God was present there. Which shouldn't really be all that surprising except that most of us only expect to encounter God in certain designated times and places—with the place where we work, not high on that list of locations.

Yet if this pandemic has opened our ears and eyes to anything it is surely that we are the Church as much outside of our sanctuaries as we are when we are in them.

After all, many of us spend as much, if not more of our time at work, than we do at any other activity.

And if Jesus says to love our neighbor, and we are better acquainted with the people we work with than we are with the people who live next door, then aren't those co-workers or customers

A study on job satisfaction has shown that the occupations with the highest ratings were found in those careers where there seemed to be a clearer attachment of meaning and value to what one did.

At the bottom of the list were jobs that involved repetitive labor or minimal creativity; where there was little sense of fulfillment or evidence that what one did held significant benefit to oneself or others.

Maybe what we all need is to be awakened to the Holy Ground where we make a living.

Like Moses, who didn't realize that the same spot where he brought his flock to be fed was the place where his own spirit could be fed.

The scripture says that Moses' on-the-job encounter with God took place at Horeb, the mountain of God.

Horeb is another name for Mount Sinai, which is where God presented to Moses the Ten Commandments.

It is the site where Moses would accomplish the great and memorable work God had called him to.

But all that was still off in the future.

When Moses led his flock there on this day, it was not yet known as the Mountain of God.

As far as Moses knew at this point, it was just a good place to feed his father-in-law's flock.

He didn't have a clue that it was already Holy Ground waiting to be revealed.

What difference might a deeper awareness of God's presence in your work mean to you? Would it help you to find new meaning in what you do? Would it affect your relationship to your co-workers or how you treated your employees?

Would it alter the ways you arrived at business decisions?

How we integrate faith and work today still holds the promise of making our own life more meaningful while creating channels for us to weave God's purposes into society and live out the values of the gospel in what we do.

No matter where we see ourselves on the so called "ladder of success," there is always room to pray for God to shape our work relationships, to guide our business decisions, to be ethical in our dealings, and to empower us to do what is right.

William Sloane Coffin, former chaplain at Yale and Pastor of Riverside Church in NY once

“A career,” he writes, “seeks to be successful, a calling to be valuable. A career tries to make money, a calling tries to make a difference. A career ... demands technical intelligence to learn a skill, to find out how to get from here to there. A calling demands critical intelligence to question whether ‘there’ is worth going toward.”

This pandemic is teaching us a new awareness about how important it is for us to care for each other’s health and safety in the jobs we do.

How to love one another with a fierce intentionality about how what we do affects those around us.

The result just may be, that it will never be “business as usual” again.

Wherever in the world it is that you labor, whether teaching in a classroom, working in an office, or driving a semi;

whether caring for children at home, tending to the sick in a hospital, or stacking shelves in Wal-Mart ... pause to be aware of God’s presence where you are and God’s call in what you are doing there.

Work and spirituality are not separate worlds. Discipleship is not a spare time proposal. You and I are always on call to apply the Gospel to every aspect of life.

There is Holy Ground all around you. It’s not only here in church.

It’s out there where you labor and where you consume the fruits of others’ labor.

So, take time to notice the burning bush calling you to remove your sandals ... your work boots, high heels, or wingtips and dig your toes into the Holy Ground where you work.

Preached FCCW September 6, 2020

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