

Scripture: Psalm 8:1-9

Message: We Live and Work in God's World

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So tomorrow is Labour Day. For many this is the last long weekend of the summer before school starts. It's the last chance to get away before the routine of the school year.

For others, this is a weekend to celebrate the blessing of work and the rights of workers. This goes back to the origins of Labour Day in Canada, which can be traced back to a printer's revolt in 1872 in Toronto. Labourers went on strike to secure a 54-hour work week, that is, a nine-hour working day. Yes, that would be for a six day working week.

At that time, any union activity was considered illegal and the organizers were jailed. According to the law, "trade unions were criminal conspiracies in restraint of trade". Protest marches of over 10,000 workers (one-tenth of the city's population) were formed in support of the jailed organizers. This eventually led to Prime Minister Sir John A. Macdonald repealing the anti-union laws and arranging the release of the organizers as well. The parades held in support of the Nine-Hour Movement and the printers' strike led to an annual celebration. In 1894 the Canadian government adopted the first Monday in September as the annual Labour Day.

What is work? Why do/did you work? There are as many different answers to that question as there are jobs. You may see work as merely a means to gain an income. It is a pay cheque. It's something to do in order to pay the bills and buy food.

Or work is considered to be a necessity of life to endure a few days of the week. The focus of life is on the weekend when you don't have to go to work. Or life is geared to retirement, when you can quit working. The work week is really three days long: Monday, which drags into "Hump Day" which is endured until TGIF, Thank God It's Friday.

Some of you would agree with Oscar Wilde who said, "Work is the curse of the drinking class."

Perhaps work is seen as a temporary stage in life, albeit a long temporary. Younger years are spent playing and going to school to prepare for a life of work. Work is endured with the goal of escaping into that 'someday' when you retire. So the earlier you can retire, the better life will be.

Somehow there is the idea that we are to work for a while and then there comes a time when we quit working. You only have to listen to the ads from investment companies or the

lottery and gaming commission. Make the big money and you can thumb your nose at the boss as you walk out the door. We live for the day when we won't have to work anymore.

In a lot of ways we allow work to define us. When we meet someone new we may ask for their name, but very early in the conversation will come the question, "And what do/did you do?" What is your area of work? That seems to be an important piece of information to know about someone. The work they do defines them. They might be a mere labourer or an important executive. They might have a low position on the ladder, which makes them ordinary, or an important position which supposedly makes them special.

There are others who will speak very highly of work. They enjoy what they are doing and the challenges and opportunities which work gives. There are those who look up against retirement because it will mean giving up the regular activity of work which is enjoyed daily. Others enjoy retirement because it gives different options for other work or activities.

As Psalm 8 celebrates the majesty of God, it also highlights the respected value given to people by this majestic God. This psalm celebrates the work which God has given us to do in his creation.

People are both the crown of creation and its destroyer. Without people this world would be infinitely better and infinitely worse. It would be infinitely better, because without people there would be no war and no divorce and no heartache. If there were no human beings, there would be no pollution and no crime. There would be only clear streams, wide open horizons, untouched forests and natural development.

But without people the world would be infinitely worse because there would be no art or music or literature. There never would have been the joy of a newborn baby's cry, the thrill of a wedding, the glow of love. Minerals would lie hidden forever in the earth, gems undiscovered, fields of waving grain unknown. Diamonds would never have been cut to reflect a thousand sparkles. There would have been no cathedrals with soaring arches and no one to capture majestic sunsets on film.

Who are we? What are we doing here? When we acknowledge God we come to an understanding of who we are. "You made him...You crowned him." It is God who made us. And we know from the account of that creation that we were made in God's image. Then we can know where our goodness and brilliance and creativity has come from.

This also helps us understand our purpose: "You made them ruler." God has placed us in

dominion of this whole creation. We live and work in this world because God has put us here. People are given control of everything that God has made: flocks, herds, beasts, birds, and fish. Certainly that list could also include things like plants, soil, trees, minerals, water. "You put everything under their feet."

The accusation has been made that this permission to have control or dominion over creation has been interpreted as permission to take advantage of creation and nearly destroy it.

Of course, that is not what God intended. Having been given dominion does not give us permission to exploit this creation or to abuse it. It is not a permission to take advantage of this control which God has given us. We are stewards. That means we must take care of that which was entrusted to us. We must be responsible in what we do in this world.

We see the work we do as being stewards of what God has given us. We have been given skills to use. Some people can design a building, others can construct it. Some people work with pipes and wires, while others work with ideas and people. Some people can creatively prepare food and express wonderful hospitality, while others of us are great guests and eat well. We have different areas where we are responsible.

As we carry out our responsibility, as we do our work, we realize that it is not done first of all for ourselves. This is not *my* job, *my* pay cheque, *my* income. As we confess in the Contemporary Testimony, "In our work, even in dull routine, we hear the call to serve our Lord." Whatever work you do, wherever you find yourself on the corporate ladder, see that you are serving the Lord, not yourself. As stewards, we are answerable to the God who made us and placed us here.

And so to understand our place in this world and the work we do, we must also know who this majestic God is. We are a creature with authority in this world. But it is ours only because God has given it to us. We have power over all things, but we exercise it in response to the God who gave us that power.

Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth.

We know this God as the Creator and Sustainer of this universe, including our earth. That is the first revelation of the Bible, God created. It is the first line of our confession in the Apostles' Creed, "I believe in God the Father Almighty, Creator of the heavens and the earth."

We also know this God as our Redeemer and Saviour in Jesus Christ. The images of salvation that we read in the Old Testament imply a healing and wholeness between God and

people, but also for the land. Shalom, peace, the kingdom of God include a restored creation where the land produces abundant harvests and eventually animals live together in perfect harmony.

In Hebrews 2:5ff, we find these words from Psalm 8 quoted in reference to Jesus Christ. Jesus became like us, a little lower than the angels. Now he is crowned with glory and honour "because he suffered death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone." By his death he has destroyed him who holds the power of death--that is the devil.

In Christ we can know and express our identity as image-bearers of God in a new way. We can work toward a restored creation. We do so trusting in God who was and is in control. We work toward overcoming the influence and power of evil which destroys our world. We do so in the confidence that Jesus has overcome that power. We long with all creation for the complete deliverance and victory that will come when Jesus returns.

We also know this God as a life-giving Spirit. It was the Spirit that first hovered over the emptiness at creation in Genesis 1. Psalm 104:30 says "When you send your Spirit, they are created, and you renew the face of the earth." The Spirit gives life and renewal. The promise of the outpouring of the Spirit found in Joel 2 and quoted at Pentecost comes in a context of a renewed creation (see Joel 2:22ff).

Our place in this world is in response to a Triune God who creates, restores and renews creation. Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth. Caring for and restoring creation is part of our relationship with our Triune God.

As we work our fields and harvest our crops, we consider what we are doing to God's world. As we spread our fertilizers and herbicides we consider their effect on God's creation. As we put our garbage in the bags we consider what we are doing to God's world. As we study and prepare for our vocations, we consider how we are responding to our Creator God. All that we do, in farming and industry, in management and business, in construction, in research and development, in retirement, must be fitting with the responsibility that God has given us in this world.

As we go about our daily activities of work or play, we do so trusting in the God who made this creation. We live and work in God's world. He put us here. We serve Him. He is in control. He will bless us. We go forward seeking to be faithful to the authority that God has given us.

Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth!

Amen.