

“Job Satisfaction”
October 10, 2010
Grove Presbyterian Church

Old Testament Lesson

Ecclesiastes 2: 1-11

I said to myself, ‘Come now, I will make a test of pleasure; enjoy yourself.’ But again, this also was vanity. I said of laughter, ‘It is mad’, and of pleasure, ‘What use is it?’ I searched with my mind how to cheer my body with wine—my mind still guiding me with wisdom—and how to lay hold on folly, until I might see what was good for mortals to do under heaven during the few days of their life. I made great works; I built houses and planted vineyards for myself; I made myself gardens and parks, and planted in them all kinds of fruit trees. I made myself pools from which to water the forest of growing trees. I bought male and female slaves, and had slaves who were born in my house; I also had great possessions of herds and flocks, more than any who had been before me in Jerusalem. I also gathered for myself silver and gold and the treasure of kings and of the provinces; I got singers, both men and women, and delights of the flesh, and many concubines.

So I became great and surpassed all who were before me in Jerusalem; also my wisdom remained with me. Whatever my eyes desired I did not keep from them; I kept my heart from no pleasure, for my heart found pleasure in all my toil, and this was my reward for all my toil. Then I considered all that my hands had done and the toil I had spent in doing it, and again, all was vanity and a chasing after wind, and there was nothing to be gained under the sun.

New Testament Lesson and Reflection

II Thessalonians 3: 8-10

Whoever wrote the book of Ecclesiastes was one unhappy fellow. Nothing seems to satisfy. Not pleasure. Not wealth. Not worldly success. External emptiness. For guys this is especially tough. Most of the women I know gain their identity from relationships. The men I know, get it from what they achieve. Frustration when the outside tastes dry and futile.

Why do we work?

Back according to the myth, the saga, of Adam and Eve, we were created right off to work, to till and cultivate the crops in the garden in the land of Eden. We were farmers. What made it paradise was, the work was guaranteed to be satisfying and successful.

After the fall, after getting kicked out of the garden, we still work, but without now guarantees of either success or satisfaction. It will be hard. Bounty not guaranteed. Maybe, when it works out, better than paradise then.

It does help to eat. Paul's reason to work. He himself was a tentmaker, a leather worker. He paid his own way. No work, no food. Paul was especially annoyed by all the itinerant preachers who would basically migrate from congregation to congregation teaching and preaching and expecting to be cared for, housed, and fed.

They were free-loaders. When you free-load, you betray the message.

But Paul remaining independent and self-sufficient also made sure he wasn't owned by the congregations he served.

Paul was also annoyed by those who expected Jesus to return real soon. They became idlers. Why finish building the house or planting crops for next season if Jesus is coming any minute?

Listen:

...and we did not eat anyone's bread without paying for it; but with toil and labour we worked night and day, so that we might not burden any of you. This was not because we do not have that right, but in order to give you an example to imitate. For even when we were with you, we gave you this command: Anyone unwilling to work should not eat.

What about your work gives you satisfaction?

Fact -- **100 years ago** the overwhelming majority in developed countries worked with their hands – farms, domestic service, craft shops, and a few in factories

Fact -- **50 years ago** 50% did manual labor, with over half employed in factories

Fact -- **today** 15% of the workforce are in factories, with “Knowledge Workers” the fastest growing group – those whose jobs require formal and advance schooling

Fact -- number of jobs in a lifetime? 10.8 for those 18-42 years old

Fact -- average longevity in a job for wage earners is 4 years; for young adults the average years on a job is 2.7

Are you happy with your occupation, your toil, whether job, career, profession?

Some definitions might be useful.

Career: a complete course or progress (a race-course), from OF *cariere*, road.

Occupation: the generic term for a state of being busy, dwell in, inhabit, from L. *occup* < ob, to, + *capio*, take, as in a military occupation of a territory.

Job: a piece of work done, a scheme for getting money, a task.

Profession: mental rather than manual labor involving special attainments or discipline, an occupation that requires a liberal education to acquire it, L. *prof*, forth, + *fateor*, confess. Traditionally there were only three professions: theology, medicine, law -- each requiring an oath of professional conduct, a declaration of values.

Bill Jeffreys shared some material with me several years ago that is especially useful for those of us who've been working for years. What are we going to do, the material challenged, with the second half of our lives?

The advice presumes that at this point in our lives we've come to some basic conclusions, such as we've got some idea about what we are good at and what we're lousy at. For it is far easier to keep improving what we are good at rather than trying to improve our areas of incompetence to a level of mediocrity.

The material sketches out three basic directions you can take.

First is a second career. You bring to a drastic halt what you have been doing and go do something entirely different. Example: the librarian who becomes an investor.

Second is the parallel career. You keep doing what you're doing, mostly because you have to if you want to pay the bills, but parallel to that you engage in some work that you find rewarding in other ways. Example: the dentist who enjoys photography.

Third is the social entrepreneur model, where you gradually decline your investment in your original career and develop out of it an alternative career which eventually takes over. The pastor becoming columnist.

Does your work satisfy? What are key factors?

- Decent wage or salary
- Job Security
- Good work facilities and equipment
- Use and value of talents
- Flexibility and independence
- Advancement opportunities and job enrichment and personal growth
- Work environment: decent co-workers or customers

- ❑ A boss who actually isn't an idiot
- ❑ Quality of work itself – you do something worthwhile, beneficial

Maybe there's another satisfaction factor, especially when you'd rather be doing something else.

We turn to that paragon of fatherhood: Homer Simpson. Homer teaches us from the episode, "And Maggie Make Three." Homer had finally found his dream job.

What is your dream job?

Homer's was in the bowling alley, which allowed him to tell off his boss, Mr. Burns. But Marge announced another baby was on the way. They needed a better income than the bowling alley provided. Despite his anger at this unplanned, unwanted baby, Homer was man enough to grovel and plead for his old job back.

Mr. Burns smugly allowed him to return, but only after rubbing it in by placing a plaque at Homer's work station. The plaque said: "Don't forget: you're here forever,"

Maggie was born. Homer immediately fell in love with her. He took all of her baby photos to work, positioning them around the plaque to alter it into saying: "Do it for her."

Homer Simpson: class act. Maggie's a very good reason to do what you have to do.

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Vital is to clarify vocation from occupation. Our occupation is how we occupy ourselves. My occupation is pastor. But my job is not my vocation. Our occupations – from bricklayer to surgeon, carpenter to computer analyst, cook to accountant, plumber to pharmacist -- become opportunities to demonstrate and prove our vocation. For 'vocation' comes from the Biblical word for 'calling,' a 'bidding, a 'summons.'

My vocation isn't clocking in as a professional minister. My calling is to be Christ's man. A loving work to do. Loving work.

*Materialism and empty values are worthless*  
-- W. E. B. Dubois

How did you end up doing what you are doing (or what you did)? Did you fall into by accident? Is it what you are expected? Did you always want to do what you're doing?

If you could do something over, what would it be? Any regrets? Did you take advantage of all opportunities to grow, get certified in other areas, open new doors for yourself? Or did you paint yourself into a corner? Trapped.

The mirror test: are you who you want to see in the morning? Is what you are doing consistent with what you value? Do you know what your value?

The mirror test. Can you look at yourself in mirror without shame?

The family test. Can your wife, husband, parent, child view you as someone with integrity, someone to be proud of?

The Jesus test. Can Jesus look at the work of your hands and the attitude of your heart and say, yes, I'm proud of you?