

# “Protestant Work Ethic”

Grove Presbyterian Church

September 4, 2011

Labor Day: lots of good things achieved by labor. Such as little Ella baptized here this morning. Hard labor.

Labor Day: the Federal holiday initiated by the labor unions “dedicated to the social and economic achievements of American workers”

*I'm just a lonesome traveler, The Great Historical Bum.  
Highly educated from history I have come.  
I built the Rock of Ages, 'twas in the Year of One  
And that was about the biggest thing that man had ever done.*

Labor Day: finally enacted in 1894 by President Grover Cleveland to make amends for upsetting the labor unions. It seems government troops and Federal marshals busted up the Pullman strike by killing 13 striking workers and wounding 57 more. Oh, pardon me...

Labor Day: also a fine day to applaud the Protestant Work Ethic. The Protestant Work Ethic was a term coined by German sociologist Max Weber in 1904, ten years after Labor Day became an official Federal holiday.

How did he describe the Protestant Work Ethic?

*“It is a code of morals based on the principles of thrift, discipline, hard work, and individualism. The adjective Protestant is explained by the fact that these qualities were seen to have been especially encouraged by the Protestant religion, especially those denominations based on the tenets of Calvinism.”*

Calvin, the father of us Presbyterians, argued that the Bible reveals how each of us are gifted with special aptitudes and abilities, each according to our nature. Work becomes an act of devotion. The purpose of work is not merely self-profit or personal gain. Calvin doesn't despise wealth, not all all. Rather, he warns how profit and wealth must never be aims, for that then is sinful and idolatrous, but tools for investing in further social improvement. Piety must guide wealth or it becomes demonic.

Let's revisitl Ghandi's Seven Deadly Social Sins:

Politics without principle  
Wealth without work  
Commerce without morality  
Pleasure without conscience  
Education without character  
Science without humanity

Worship without sacrifice

Or as Paul writes to the Ephesian church:

**The gifts he gave were that some would be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until all of us come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to maturity, to the measure of the full stature of Christ. We must no longer be children, tossed to and fro and blown about by every wind of doctrine, by people's trickery, by their craftiness in deceitful scheming.**

Equipped for the work of ministry. Where we are.

We all are called to use our gifts to build up each other, shape our world, work hard to bring society into alignment with the Kingdom of God. In effect, stop looking into the sky for the second coming of Christ and everything made right. Look to God at work through yourself. Look to God at work through the other members of church.

Good thing this work ethic.

It is, after all, the founding ethos of our capitalist country.

But, as worthy as is this ethic, it is not God nor the source of our salvation.

After all, you can work real hard, give your heart to your job or business, play by all the rules, but still get laid off or the business folds. No guarantees. Little loyalty. This work world has a way of being very unpredictable, migratory, incoherent.

After all, you can work real hard at marriage, do what you think is best, play by all the rules, and disappointments still can happen.

After all, you can work real hard at raising kids, do what you think is best, play by all the rules, but it doesn't guarantee their success or their happiness.

Life is hard. Since when can anything of this buffeted, fragmented world bring coherence to your unfair days? Bring meaning to your erratic existence?

I rely instead in the One who labors with me.

Faith brings me meaning.

Grace alone brings coherence.

Looking for what you achieve to value and justify your life, well now, you've got another think coming.

We really can show her, Ella, and all the little ones, a better way.