

“Faith Works”

Deut 5:13-15; Gal 6:7-10; Rom 2:2-11;  
Rom 1:16-17; Luke 10:38-42

September 1, 2013  
Pastor Norman Fowler  
First Presbyterian Church of Moscow

There was a couple that moved into a very small town in the mountains of Colorado. They were pretty sure of who they were. Yet over the first year of their life there, they began to wonder. You see, they had been doctors before they had gotten there, well respected in the community they had left. This new little community seemed not to care who they had been. That re-imagining of their lives was disconcerting, unsettling.

There was a time when my company came to me and said, “We don’t have enough money to pay all our employees anymore. We’re laying you off.” It’s a time that was disconcerting and unsettling.

There are dreams. Maybe you, like some of us, said, “I want to be president when I grow up,” and find that we never quite make it there. We wonder about the job that we do achieve and whether we’ve really attained what we think we were supposed to attain or what our dreams suggested we might attain.

We can be a little like Kathleen Warnick when she said, “I’m not a housewife; I never married the house.” But she was able to say, “I am a homemaker,” beginning to try to identify herself.

Perhaps we’re students and how much that becomes who we are as we go to class and do homework.

Or maybe it’s just the busyness of life. I don’t know how many times I’ve talked about how busy I am and sometimes it feels like a badge of honor. So when Martha comes to Jesus saying, “Look how busy I am! Can’t you tell my sister to come help me?” it takes me back a little bit. She’s doing what she needs to be doing.

It’s interesting how easy it is, at least it’s easy for me, to get tied up in my job and make it my identity, and then to encounter something that suggests that it’s not. Or that if it is, it’s been taken away.

It’s clear that what we do is valued. Out of Deuteronomy, we hear that we’re supposed to take one day of the week to honor God. There’s a recognition that the rest of the days, we work. Work is valuable and valued.

I have a baseball bat. There are a number of reasons why a person might hold a baseball bat. Maybe I'm a baseball player. Maybe I make bats. Maybe I'm giving it away—a coach or a parent giving a baseball bat to a child so they might learn to play. Maybe I'm a thug. Maybe I'm just a silly preacher with a point to try to make. You see, it can be a lot of different things.

When we come to the idea of work, the way we do it, what we do, we can think about it in a lot of different ways. In some ways, it's the perspective we bring or the context that gets formed around it. As I demonstrated the different ways of holding the bat, it began to tell what I was doing and who I was in relationship to it.

As we think about the nature of work, I began to look at scripture and some basic understanding of what it might think of as work, our work. We could look at the gifts that God gives – and there are different opportunities within the family of faith – but it doesn't spend a lot of time looking at the other kinds of work we do. It doesn't tell us whether a farmer is any better than a plumber or a university president. In fact, we read that we're all going to be judged by the same standards, so it doesn't seem the range is what matters so much. But what Paul goes on to say is that what matters is that we do good. It's not so much whether I'm a baseball player, a coach, a maker of bats, a pastor trying to make a point, but in the process, am I doing good. Are we doing good and are we honoring God?

We can come to work with a lot of different motivations. I can go to work because I have to. I can go to work because I want the paycheck. I can go to work because there's a certain amount of status in it. I can go to work because I love the project I'm working on, the things I'm doing. I can go to work because I love the people who are there. There are a lot of reasons to do work. I think what Paul is suggesting is that a foundational reason for our work is to do good. That might embody some level of reason within our work, but does the work define us? James says, basically, that faith without works is dead. But through my works I can show you my faith. So there is a way in which the work begins to be a window into who we are—or the way we do the job we do shows our works.

But what really is the bottom line about who we are? Clearly, that God cares about what we do. *We reap what we sow* is pretty clear. But then we read those lines out of Romans: it is by faith we are saved. At the bottom of it all, it's not just that we do good, but we know the One that's good. It is through faith. It is that trust in the One who loves us. It is finding that God calls us all to the table. It is that wonder of forgiveness that lets us be part of the family of God.

I would suggest that the way faith works is that it enters us into a relationship with God. It develops us as a family of faith, and out of that our faith works. It works on us that we do good. It works on us that we care for one another. Faith works to develop a family of faith. It's amazing how many times I realize that God invites me in to be a child of his, helps me to recognize that I am, and then to see what it means to be part of that family of faith, to call God my Father, and to be one of his children, and yet I realize I've often gone off the rails. There's this opportunity, this wonder about what God does, ever bringing us back whether it's the first time we come, the second time, or however many times we can do it over a lifetime. We get to come to the table and be told again, and be renewed as, and be reinitiated into the family of faith. Around the table, we are invited again to not only let that faith work in our lives as we become one who trusts and finds the forgiveness and the goodness of God in Jesus Christ, but then to go as one in whom faith works to do the good. People may not be able to see it in everything we do, but hopefully over time in our context of living it comes out. You can see the difference in the way I'm holding the bat that I'm not a thug, but maybe I want to give a gift.

Our work is important. It doesn't define who we are. I think being children of God is much closer to defining who we are. But it does show who we are and whose we are, whose family we belong to. We are invited to reconfirm, or to confirm for the first time, that we are members of the family of faith, children of God, by God's grace through Jesus Christ. Amen.

Lord, we recognize the ups and downs of life and how sometimes we become engaged in the job or work we do. Sometimes we feel it ripped away from us, and we wonder at what that means for our own identity. Help us recognize that the foundation of our identity is with you and as one of your children. By grace you have invited us to be your children and we come, thankful for that. Help us see the work we do as the work of faith, our attempt to bring goodness to the world. Whether it's through the job we do or the other ways we live, or the entire way we live, let our faith work. Through Jesus Christ we pray. Amen.