

The Christian At Work, II      10/10/21

Last Spring Bonnie and I attended a musical here in Gettysburg called, "Working." It's based on a 1974 book by Chicago writer, Studs Terkel, entitled, "Working: People Talk about What They Do All Day and How They Feel About What They Do." Terkel interviewed over 100 people about their jobs for the book! In the musical, two performers contrasted the two views of work we highlighted in last week's sermon. Grace Clements, played by our own Jamie Bowman, was a millworker who didn't enjoy her job at all and was concerned about the physical toll it was taking on her. But she planned to continue in the job as long as she could, because it allowed her to provide for her kids as a single mom. She saw work as necessary, but irksome!

On the other hand, waitress Dolores Dante, played by Carrie Conklin, took great pride in her work, feeling a lot of satisfaction about efficiently providing food and conversation to her customers. For her, working as a waitress was almost an art, perhaps even a calling! In Grace and Dolores we see two very different views of work, both of which can be found in the Bible, as we saw last week.

Since Terkel wrote his book, there have been tremendous changes to work in our country. Many good blue-collar jobs have been lost and will not be coming back. Service industries have flourished as have all kinds of

tech-related jobs. The pandemic accelerated the trend of working from home at least part of the time. And the gig economy, including jobs like Uber and Lyft drivers, has rapidly expanded. It allows workers to operate with a lot of flexibility and independence, but with little protection or security.

Regardless of the changes, there are important things the Bible has to say about how Christians ought to work, and that's what we're going to focus on this morning. We begin with integrity. Listen to these words from Colossians 3. <sup>22</sup>*Slaves, obey your earthly masters in everything, not only while being watched and in order to please them, but wholeheartedly, fearing the Lord.* <sup>23</sup>*Whatever your task, put yourselves into it, as done for the Lord and not for your masters,* <sup>24</sup>*since you know that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward; you serve the Lord Christ. Masters, treat your slaves justly and fairly, for you know that you also have a Master in heaven.* (Col. 3:22-24; 4:1)

Many members of the early Christian church were slaves, and Paul instructs them to work hard as a matter of Christian principle, knowing that God will reward them, even if their masters do not! I think that's the first part of integrity at work- doing an honest day's work for your salary. Are you doing that? Also notice that there is also instruction here for slave owners, who often worshiped in the same congregation as their slaves!

They were to treat their slaves “justly and fairly.” If you are an employer, this applies to you. Are you treating your employees justly and fairly? I hope so. That’s the first part of integrity: work hard and treat others fairly.

The second part of integrity has to do with honesty and truthfulness. Listen to these words that go all the way back to the book of Deuteronomy.

*<sup>13</sup>You shall not have in your bag two kinds of weights, large and small. <sup>14</sup>You shall not have in your house two kinds of measures, large and small. <sup>15</sup>You shall have only a full and honest weight; you shall have only a full and honest measure, so that your days may be long in the land that the LORD your God is giving you. <sup>16</sup>For all who do such things, all who act dishonestly, are abhorrent to the LORD your God. (Deut. 25:13-16)* God expects his people to deal honestly, not to cheat others, in this case by having different weights for buying and selling!

Today, this would apply to delivering less service or product than was agreed to, or offering a bid you can’t possibly fill at the agreed price in order to get the contract, and then later changing the terms in order to make a profit. Truthfulness has implications for what we put on our resumes. It means giving honest assessments of what needs to be done in areas where the buyer lacks knowledge- car and computer repairs come to mind, for example. Someone once said that integrity is how you behave when no one is watching. I like that! Christians work with integrity.

Second, Christians advocate for justice and fairness in the workplace. In the book of Amos, the Lord says to his people, who are attempting to worship him, <sup>21</sup>*I hate, I despise your festivals, and I take no delight in your solemn assemblies.* <sup>22</sup>*Even though you offer me your burnt offerings and grain offerings, I will not accept them; and the offerings of well-being of your fatted animals I will not look upon.* <sup>23</sup>*Take away from me the noise of your songs; I will not listen to the melody of your harps.* <sup>24</sup>*But let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an everflowing stream.* (Amos 5:21-24)

One of the main issues that Amos preached about was the way rich people in Israel were exploiting and neglecting the poor. So, he advocated for justice for them, speaking bluntly to the rich and powerful. Jesus didn't hesitate to speak truth to power, either. *Then Jesus said to the crowds and to his disciples,* <sup>2</sup>*"The scribes and the Pharisees sit on Moses' seat;* <sup>3</sup>*therefore, do whatever they teach you and follow it; but do not do as they do, for they do not practice what they teach.* <sup>4</sup>*They tie up heavy burdens, hard to bear, and lay them on the shoulders of others; but they themselves are unwilling to lift a finger to move them.* (Matt. 23:1-4) Jesus saw that the religious leaders of his day were imposing impossible requirements on the people, while failing to help them in any way. He called out those leaders for their unfairness and hypocrisy.

God expects there to be justice and fairness in the workplace.

Employers, you must look carefully at your business practices to be sure your employees are being treated fairly, that they are sharing in the profits that their work is producing, that workplace disputes are handled fairly, and that any abuse or harassment of employees is not tolerated. And employees need to advocate for such fairness, speaking truth to power even when that is very difficult to do. Sometimes that might result in the loss of a job, but other times it may result in positive change for yourself and others. God expects justice and fairness in the workplace, and we should insist on it.

Finally, Christians are called to witness to their faith in word and deed. Several of you responded to my invitation last week to talk with me about how your faith impacts your work. All of your responses fit into this area of witness, particularly in showing Christian character to those around you in the workplace. A teacher talked about working with children who live in poverty and are carrying heavy loads- a mom in prison, a homeless little boy who is constantly moving from shelter to shelter, a girl whose father is about to be deported to Mexico. This teacher cares for each child and helps them however she can, trusting that God will meet the needs that she can't. I know that many of our healthcare workers also struggle because of their concern for those who are ill, feeling helpless that they can't do more.

Two other members said that they have gifts of encouragement, so they encourage others in an educational office setting and in a corporate setting. They look for ways to affirm other people every day. One noted that she listens carefully when someone shares a personal concern with her and then remembers to pray about it later. That's part of being a witness- demonstrating Christian character and compassion.

The second part is sharing your faith when you have the opportunity. I Peter 3:15 says, "*...Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect...*" (I Peter 3:15 NIV) If you're not sure how to get started in sharing your faith, you might want to review the two sermons I preached this summer called, "The Big Story" and "Telling Your Story." They provide a pretty good foundation for beginning to share your faith with others. At its heart, this approach involves connecting your story to God's work in the world and telling others about it when you get the opportunity.

Now we need to be sensitive about doing that in the workplace, but we can certainly offer to pray for someone in need, or to share how our own faith has made a difference in the way we handle various life challenges.

One final word of caution. Some of us are tempted to rely on our work to meet our deepest needs- for security, meaning, and identity. If

we're not careful, work can become an idol in our lives. We trust in it to meet our needs and therefore become compulsive about it, putting it ahead of family, church, and community service. Work is a shaky foundation on which to place those needs, leading to a huge personal crisis when something goes wrong at work, or it's time to retire! So don't let work take God's place in your life! Only God can meet those deepest needs, not work. Take the steps you need to take to keep work in its proper place.

Christians at work. We work with integrity. We advocate for fairness and justice. And, we witness to our faith as we work. How are you doing as a Christian at work?