

Sermon: September 3, 2023
"A pencil, slide-ruler, and an act of kindness"

There is something about Labor Day. It kind-of gets to me. It's more than the "last blast" of summer or another day off. I'm sure we all have people who are important to us ... and at certain times of the year, we think about them. On Labor Day ... my thoughts turn to my dad.

As a kid, I never fully understood what my dad did for a living. He was an electrical engineer. He worked for General Telephone. Every morning at 6:00 AM ... I could peek out my upstairs bedroom window, and see him pull out of the driveway in his little Volkswagen bug. He carried his lunch in a brown paper bag. Wore a tie. Had a plastic pocket protector in his shirt pocket ... with a sharp pencil and a slide-ruler.

I was always trying to find out how much money my dad made.

Whenever I asked ... he would look-up and smile: "Enough."

Even after he retired and did things like mow the lawn ... he always had that pocket protector with the pencil and slide-ruler. I would laugh at him ----- "Dad, you don't need that anymore."

There was a moment when I was looking for a pencil. My dad smiled and pulled it out of his pocket protector. One time I was trying to make a straight line. My dad laughed a bit and handed me his slide-ruler.

He went to work everyday.

When it snowed, I looked out my bedroom window. His tire tracks were in the driveway. In a way ... without having to say a word ... my dad was teaching me ----- our calling in life is to go to work everyday.

What kind of "work" do you do???

Retired. Assisted Living. A stay-at-home-parent. Nurse's aide.

Factory line. Trying like crazy to get home from being in the hospital.

Care-taking for your loved-one at home, who is nearing life's finish-line.

"Work" comes in many shapes and sizes. Go to work. Give each day your best. Somehow ... in the middle of all this ... yes, this is where we meet God. It's where God lives.

Speaking of the dignity of work ...

There is a Culver's by us ... Quinton's favorite place to eat . I

I go in the other day with Q and 3 of my grandkids. A young man ... who seems to be pretty new at this job ... starts taking our order. My grandkids share what they want ... then they change their minds ... ketchup? ---- no ... well, maybe so. Change my drink to a strawberry shake ... did I say no whip cream??

Single or double cheeseburger???

One of each???

The young man at the counter gets so confused. He hands me the receipt, and it's all messed-up.

Bianca sees her co-worker is having trouble. She comes over ... and very patiently helps him get the order straight. I admire her patience with her co-worker. She remembers my name and Q's from the other day.

She introduces herself to my grandkids. She mentions her 8-year-old son.

The next day we are back ... just me and Q. She greets us --- "Hi, Don and Q ... enjoyed meeting your grandkids."

As I leave, I go up to Bianca.

"Yesterday I saw how you treated your co-worker ... and then took care of us. Thank-you."

She smiles: "Isn't that what we are supposed to do in life?"

Bianca ... showing some "unordinary grace" in an "ordinary moment."

Did you see the story? ----- where the remains of a soldier who was shot down in World War II have been identified??? The family is so grateful that he has been "accounted for."

I think of those words ---- "accounted for."

Each one of us ... in life .. wants to be "accounted for." We need to have purpose ... a reason for living. We may not admit it ----- but we need to matter, we need to be appreciated.

There are times when we can easily lose our sense of purpose. I guess that's why Labor Day has such a place in my heart. A dad who tried to teach me about the honor and dignity and purpose of work.

I often think about a small town preacher, whom I met in college. I would occasionally worship at his church. Reverend Pat was a simple man. On Sunday morning he would put on a choir robe ... no fancy robes or stoles for him. He preached with no notes.

I was there one Sunday when the pastor and council were interviewing a candidate to be his assistant. Over lunch ... the young pastor asks Rev. Pat ---- how often will I preach. Pat responds: EVERY SUNDAY!! Every Sunday??? OF COURSE ... preaching is what being a minister is all about. You do one service ... I'll do the other. We will switch-up ... so no one will know ahead of time who the preacher is!!

But ---- I need about 20 hours per week in my office to prepare a sermon.

20 hours???? ... how can you get a sermon done in that short amount of time???

Rev. Pat ---- how long does it take you???

24/7 All day. Everyday is a sermon. It's where God lives and speaks to us!!@@!

Yes, we are called to live the gospel everyday. On Sunday we talk about it.

Daily life --- it's where God lives.

I'll never forget that conversation. Everyday is a "sermon."

Everyday is "Labor Day."

It's where God walks with us ... so we can give life our very best.

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