

*Psalm 139:1-6, 13-18*  
*Jeremiah 18:1-6 (11)*

Labor Day weekend – a time that, for me, has always marked the transition from Summer to Fall –

- Students are back in school!
- We begin to see slight changes in the weather...
- Football is back...
- Program year kicks off!

And Labor Day itself always created a special space to be with family and friends, or to go on an adventure. But Labor Day is more than a day to sleep in, or go tubing...

In the late 19th century, individuals that made up the trade union and labor movements proposed a day be set aside, to celebrate labor. In 1894, it became a federal holiday. A day set aside to honor the contributions American workers have made, to the strength, prosperity laws and well-being of this country.

In one way or another, we've all been influenced by labor – whether it was by a job we hold, or held, or work that we do at home, on the farm, in the garden, with a paint brush, or with our hands, whatever work we've filled our lives with, we've encountered labor that we do or that others have done.

Another way of thinking about this labor we do with our lives is to think of it in terms of **vocation**. Vocation is often used to refer to one's work in the world, as if it is simply synonymous with "occupation" or "career."

It is not uncommon, for people to reduce vocation simply to work, whatever work it is you do, to get a paycheck. We are told:

- Work hard so you can play hard
- Work is a necessary evil
- Work is a grind
- Work is merely a means to power, wealth, and leisure
- Work brings purpose and joy.

Now, there's some truth in these maxims, **but** as people shaped by the **work** of a God, who entered into our midst, lived and showed up in a different way, and was ultimately killed because of it, taking on our brokenness... work, however, in the context of vocation, and particularly Christian Vocation, looks different to us.

When we gather to worship, when we gather around the table and font. When we lift up our voices and hear the word proclaimed, we hear and participate, in a different **story** about **work**.

---

Because sermons are meant to be preached and are therefore prepared with the emphasis on verbal presentation, the written accounts occasionally stray from proper grammar and punctuation. Copyright ©2022. All rights reserved. These sermon manuscripts are intended for personal use only and may not be republished or used in any way without the permission of the author.

A story of a God who creates and knits all life together; a story of a God who calls us by name, knows us intimately, and embraces us in the fullness of who we are, a story of a God who continues to work in our midst, pointing us toward a different way of being in this world.

A story of a God who ordained good works for us to walk in regardless of our occupations, regardless of what season of “work” or vocation that we find ourselves in – whether in a transition between jobs, or entering retirement, or the start of new school year, it’s a story of a God working with us and in us, as we act and work in the world.

Our scripture passage from the prophet Jeremiah, shares a prophetic announcement from God, to the people of Judah and Jerusalem. Using the image of a potter working at the wheel, shaping a clay vessel, the prophet explains how God works the people like clay, toward both good and bad depending on how they live. It’s a stark warning that rings throughout, but Verse 8 echoes with hope, noting that depending on how the people live, **God’s mind could be changed.**

Now, prophetic passages in scripture do different things, some name truths about a community, a nation, or individuals, others speak of a fate already determined by God, but this passage from Jeremiah serves more as a **function of persuasion** – that the people who hear this word, might change their behavior to follow the commands of God by enacting justice in all that they do.

One scholar notes that in Jeremiah 17, just before our passage, “a list of curses and blessings are given...While the curses were stipulated for those who violate the covenant oath, blessings that were promised are given to those who trust God.”

“The specific sins of Judah and Jerusalem mentioned are the worship of other gods, and gaining wealth through unjust or oppressive means...” and these two accusations of guilt are intertwined. Jeremiah appeals to the people to change their ways, so that they can avert disaster – it’s a prophetic pronouncement to bring about change, to restore justice and equity, so that a bright future might arrive. Jeremiah’s prophetic word is one for a particular community, at a particular time, and a particular place.

### **Yet, it is also a prophetic pronouncement toward us.**

In all that we do, as the potter – in our own work, and our own vocation, shaping the realities in our midst. And in all that we do as clay – how we respond to the realities, that press and shape against us and this world – we’re called to participate in God’s movement to bring change that restores justice for ALL people. This is the **work** of our shared calling as followers of Christ, and this work is intimately woven within our vocation.

In Paul’s letter to the Colossians, he instructs the faith community to teach Scripture, and to sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs, he concludes that, “whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God.”

In other words, every Christian’s vocation *is* worship.

Our shared calling as followers of Christ **begins here**, in this space, gathered around table and font, to honor Christ as Lord with our lips and lives, in every endeavor we undertake. And to carry that in all that we do, all our work, wherever we go.

This morning, we've had the gift of having Christopher, use his hands to craft some pottery. I am so grateful that we've been invited into Christopher's intimate vocation of creating. Artists have the ability to rip off our veils and rhythms of habit that obscure the beauty of life. They restore color and texture and smell to fragments of our lives that have become disembodied in a shadow of abstraction.

Christopher's work reminds me of other people, living their Christian Vocation in all that they do:

- I think of the social worker, working to undue unjust housing policies.
- I think of the student who notices the quiet kid in the corner, and brings them into the circle.
- I think of the teacher who goes above and beyond when no one else notices.
- I think of the volunteer at an LGBTQIA safe space gathering, who sees a participant, struggling to understand why she's being told she can't be a who she is and a Christian – and offers her another story affirming her in the fullness of who she is.
- I think of the farm worker, who fights for his fellow laborers, seeking to bring them dignity, even if their told their humanity isn't valid.
- I think of the writer, who with careful attention to words, breaks old paradigms and breathes life into dry bones.

We are a people loved and redeemed by a God, who longs for us to see the beauty in every face, and in every place.

To use the language of the writer Parker Palmer,  
**vocation**, is not a goal to be achieved  
**but a gift to be received,**  
it is a gift that God breathes into each of our beings,  
each and every day.

It's a calling that should govern and pervade all other calls **in or on** our lives.

But Christian **vocation** has also always meant something even more, a universal **call** to communion with God and with one another. It involves *working* to break down the barriers that seek to withhold dignity within the "other" and prevents relationships from forming.

So today as we come to the Table. We come mindful of our calling, to love God, to love others, and to seek the flourishing for all people. And here at this table, we receive the grace, and loving tenderness of a God who animates not just this world, but our whole being. May the nourishment we receive here, ground us in the story of hope that beckons us toward grace, kindness, justice, and peace.

**In the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.**