

Monday's Coming
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The Monroe Congregational Church, UCC
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1 Corinthians 15: 1-26, 51-58

I've consistently held a job since I was about 12 years old. How many different ones have I had? I've probably lost count. I've done everything from house-painting to tending bar at an Italian restaurant. I've designed corporate presentations, sorted parts in my dad's plumbing store and worked as a pharmacist's assistant. I've scooped ice cream at Friendly's, washed the floors of a nursing home and balanced client accounts at a marketing firm. For me, life is more meaningful because of work, not less. So I understand the folks who win the lottery and keep their day jobs, I probably would do the same. And yet, probably like you, I've discovered that there will be moments when work can be less than fulfilling.

I once worked at an alumni call center. My job was to call people on the phone and ask them for donations to various UCONN programs. Back in 1990, people didn't screen their calls like they do today (the technology didn't exist) so most of my calls were actually answered! And the people I spoke to weren't happy to hear me yammering on about their alma mater during the dinner hour. Most days, given all the rejection I received, was like dying a thousand little deaths.

I remember this one call I made to a retired senior (for the sake of this sermon I'll call her Gladys). Gladys was actually NICE to me. She kept me on the line for nearly ten minutes telling me about her life as a Husky before promising to send in \$5. She treated me like I was one of her grandchildren,

which it turns out I needed. After we hung up my shift was over and I practically skipped home back to my dorm room.

It's the final Sunday of the Easter season, a time for contemplating how resurrection changes everything. Last week, we focused on the resurrecting power of love. The week before that, Senior PF spoke to us about the resurrecting power of hope, as they invited us to be the light in a dark place for others. Resurrection really does change everything... even our work.

Oh, and by work, I mean to include the stay at home parents, who are raising the next generation (without the benefits of labor laws most others enjoy). And also those busy seniors, who find themselves juggling more commitments to others than they ever did before. And last but not least, the students who give their time and energy helping other in service projects.

Some of the most important work we do is not financially compensated.

In our reading today, the apostle Paul provides his readers with an explanation of resurrection. Corinth was a diverse community, beliefs in life after death varied just as much as I imagine ours do. He was writing to them in order to correct some confusion, recounting his own experience of the risen Christ as proof of how the resurrection transformed him from Pharisee to Disciple.

Their big question then is the same one we spend a lot of time thinking about: what does the future hold for us and those we love after we die? God redeems... we don't know how, that part is a mystery, but something happens in that moment that is transformative. It gives us hope, especially in times of loss and grief, that death does not have the final word, it is not an end but a beginning, and love always wins.

In the beginning, we are told that God created a very good world – it is one worth saving, despite everything we human beings do to mess that up. At the end, the promises and prophecies of Revelation say that this precious creation will not be discarded or destroyed, will be healed and redeemed along with humanity. So it's not just our individual souls that God is saving, but all of creation. And if it is all of God's beloved Creation that is being redeemed, what happens here actually does matter.

As ones created in the image of God, it is our responsibility to do something about this brokenness. We proclaim resurrection through our discipleship, when we make choices every day about how to spend our time and resources. To stand by and let death win is to deny the resurrection itself.

Theologian Peter Rollins has this to say:

"Without equivocation or hesitation I fully and completely admit that I deny the resurrection of Christ. ... I deny the resurrection of Christ every time I do not serve at the feet of the oppressed, each day that I turn my back on the poor; I deny the resurrection of Christ when I close my ears to the cries of the downtrodden and lend my support to an unjust and corrupt system.

However, there are moments when I affirm that resurrection, few and far between as they are. I affirm it when I stand up for those who are forced to live on their knees, when I speak for those who have had their tongues torn out, when I cry for those who have no more tears left to shed."

Death and resurrection have created a fractal, a repeating pattern in all of creation. We see it in nature, but we also experience it in the "deadness" of our sin and the "resurrection" of forgiveness and reconciliation. Dying to sin and rising to newness of life is the power of the Spirit at work in us, and the pattern of our discipleship.

When we give ourselves fully to the work that we've been given now, and know that what we do is inherently meaningful; it's a small part of what it means to be made in the image of God.

Malcolm Gladwell tells a good story about what it is to give ourselves fully to our work in his book "Outliers". In 1959, years before the Beatles ever came to the states; they were invited to go to Hamburg, Germany to be the house band at a club where they stayed for a number of months, working 8 hour sets each day with no days off.

It's been estimated that before they even came to America and made it big they had played together as a band 12,000 times. In that extraordinary crucible, the Beatles taught themselves to be a great band. Not one of them was, at that age, a natural musician. What made them special their willingness to spend that amount of time and effort with each other.

Maybe none of us have the talent of a member of the Fab 4, but each one of us has been given something to do, something that we are specifically gifted for. Every single form of work that moves humanity closer to God's future realm of peace is important.

Imagine if we began to see all careers in this light. Perhaps we would begin inviting not just our summer mission teams, but also our educators in the fall or our accountants during the spring tax season up front here in worship for a prayer of blessing.

Or maybe we would organize small groups of stay-at-home parents, computer programmers, nurses or contractors to gather and support one another as they try to bring their whole selves to their jobs.

Or what if we developed mentor programs, where seasoned or retired professionals could come alongside recent graduates and help them begin their careers rooted in the values that Jesus taught were most important?

I think we'd come to see not only that what we do is meaningful; but that it is one way we can make a difference in this world. It's Sunday, and for many of us that means back to work. So let's go forth into this week with some resurrection hope. Someday we will see the fruits of our labors, and be grateful to have been a part of God's great renewal project... But for now, Monday's coming and there's still work to do. Amen.