

September 4, 2016
Psalm 94:1-4, 12-15
Pastor Rosanna McFadden
Creekside COB

“The Work of Your Hands”

Good morning! What a joy to be with you on this beautiful Labor Day Sunday , to reflect on our work and our rest, but especially on the work of God and what that means for us. I don't have to remind you -- especially you members of the Prahl family who celebrating with us this morning, that every baby is a miracle: a sign of God's work. I also don't have to remind those of you who have given birth to children -- and especially Jessica, since she's done it more recently than most of us -- that having children is work for Mom, too. There's a reason that process is called *labor*. It's work -- even when it's joyous work -- for a family to raise children. If we are fortunate, our children are with us for a long time. And if we're very fortunate, we get to see a family of several generations, like the grandparents who are here to support you today.

Psalm 92 is a psalm of Thanksgiving -- that is, a psalm which give thanks to God. Specifically, according to my study Bible, it's a psalm of Thanksgiving for Vindication; that is, thanks for deliverance from enemies. It is also, like so many other psalms, an affirmation of God's faithfulness and righteousness. This psalm is a hymn which was specifically designated as part of the Sabbath celebration. You'll remember that in Hebrew tradition, the Sabbath was the seventh day of the week which was set aside as a day of rest from our work, and to praise God for the work of creation. For the Jews, Sabbath begins at sunset on Friday, and goes through sunset on Saturday. Most Christians observe Sunday as our Sabbath, in celebration of Christ's resurrection at daybreak on Sunday morning. Every Sunday is an opportunity to acknowledge God's work of salvation, and to celebrate the new life we are given in Christ.

I'd be interested to hear what Sundays were like in the home that you grew up in. In fact, I'd encourage you to share about that around the tables during our brunch in the Gathering Area. For my family, Sunday was church day. We always, *always* went to church on Sunday morning. This was almost always our home church, but occasionally when we'd be traveling on a Sunday, we'd find a church wherever we happened to be, and drop in for worship. This was an excruciating experience as a child, and one that I'm reminded of as we have conversations about hospitality here at Creekside. Like some of you here at Creekside, my family often went out for lunch after church. Sunday evening we made Chef-Boyardee pizza -- the crust mix, pizza sauce, and powdered cheese all come in a box -- and ate it off of TV trays while we watched *Wonderful World of Disney* at 7:00 o'clock: sometimes we even got started during Mutual of Omaha's *Wild Kingdom*, which began at 6:00. I'm not suggesting there was anything especially godly about how we did Sundays in my home, although it was a comforting and familiar routine. I know some of you have your own practices. Sunday evening was special because it was the only time that we kids got to cook, and it wasn't until I had kids of my own that I realized it was the only time my mom got to rest.

It's that rhythm of work and rest that interests me, and how that informs our days and weeks and months and years. Pulitzer Prize winning poet Annie Dillard said, "How we live our days is how we live our lives." That's worth thinking about. The psalmist talks about declaring God's steadfast love in the morning, and God's faithfulness at night. In a time without artificial lighting, work days were literally days: from can see to can't see. Every night was a time for rest, because there were limited resources to do anything else. Every day had a natural cycle, and praise and thanks to God were the bookends of the day. The accumulation of all those days was a life of faithfulness and flourishing, held in the hands of God.

All that tree imagery at the end of Psalm 92 -- flourishing like a palm and growing like a cedar -- those are images of growth and long life. Verse 14 talks about the righteous and says "In old age they still produce fruit; they are always green and full of sap." Mature trees are beautiful trees: they show us what trees are supposed to be. Trees that flourish from generation to generation are a model of God's

faithfulness to us; a sign of God's righteousness and care. People who are faithful and righteous are the work of God's hands.

Unlike trees, people actually get to choose what they do and how they act. That's a pretty important difference. It's also important that we understand the difference between the work of *our* hands and the work of *God's* hands. Many of us have or have had professions or vocations. Work that we do that we are paid for: we may have invested significant time and money in education or professional training, or in experiential learning so that we can do those jobs the best we can. There are also jobs that we do for love: parenting, teaching Sunday School, volunteering at a hospital or church, designing or creating beautiful things, giving our time and support to a service club, or to serving others through disaster relief. Often there's a significant overlap between the things we were paid for and the things we volunteer to do: a professional teacher who volunteers to teach Sunday School is always a great thing for a church. All of these wonderful things which we do to support our families and to support our church or other organizations are important work. We are happiest when we feel like we are using the gifts which God gave us to do the work to which God has called us. When we do that, whatever we do, our work is blessed.

But that's still the work of *our* hands. That's different than what the psalmist is talking about in Psalm 92. Listen again to verse 4: "For you, O Lord, have made me glad by your work; at the work of your hands I sing for joy."