

September 3, 2017
Philippians 2:12-18
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“Labor Day”

It's appropriate for us to think about our work this morning, and I'd like to thank again those who shared about their work and their faith. There are some folks who offered to share who didn't have the opportunity to -- I knew I'd be in trouble if I kept you waiting too long for brunch -- but I will try and give those folks, and anyone else who was inspired by the sharing this morning, a chance to share in another service.

We in the United States, and many other places in the world, tend to divide work into two categories: paid work, and unpaid work. Sometimes we also talk about paid work as blue collar or white collar: that is, jobs in construction or manufacturing or farming, or professional work, often in an office. I heard a simple way to think of different kinds of work: some jobs you shower before you go to work, and some jobs you shower when you get done. There are obviously a whole lot of jobs which fall somewhere in between these broad categories, and some work which defies either category. But there are two words which we use to describe work which I'd like to think about specifically: *professional* and *amateur*.

You are likely familiar with the common usage of *professional*. A professional is someone who pursues their occupation as a means of livelihood, or for monetary gain -- that means it's usually paid work. A professional may be an expert at what they do -- often they have had specialized education, sometimes years of specialized education. A professional may be someone who exhibits consistent high standards of behavior, courtesy, and ethics. If we describe someone as having done “a professional job,” it's almost always a compliment to the quality of their work: whether it's decorating a cake or building a house.

But at its root, the word profession come from profess to speak and make a declaration. A professor is one who speaks and teaches others. Declarations or vows are for people who are stating a belief or a call, or people who are making a promise. Are you with me?

Amateurs are different. Often we use the word amateur in a negative way, to describe work that is sub-standard or poor quality. If we describe someone as having done “an amateurish job,” it usually means it was at least disappointing and at worst, criminal. Amateurish brain surgery is never something you want. And yet the root of *amateur* is the Latin word amo, which means Love. An amateur -- in a literal sense -- is someone who does his or her work not for money, but for love. Some of the work which is most important is done by amateurs: there is no such thing as professional parents -- not because parents don't get paid, but because they do it for love. There is no such thing as a professional pet owner -- professional pet sitters, perhaps, but owners do it for love.

So my question for you is, are Christians professionals or amateurs? Careful, it's a trick question. The answer is Yes. The apostle Paul says it this way in Philippians 2:13: “For it is God who is at work within you, enabling you both to will and to work for his good pleasure.” To will and to work is a great phrase. It means that it is not only what we do but why we do it that matters. As Christians, we are a called to be professionals: to declare that Jesus is Lord of lives, to vow to commit our lives to God and the example of Jesus. But we are also called to be amateurs: to do whatever we do out of love. I believe this is what Paul means when he writes, “Do all things without murmuring and arguing, so that you may be blameless and innocent, children of God iwithout blemish in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, in which you shine like stars in the world.” Professionals have the skills to do the work which needs to be done; amateurs shine like stars. Christians get to be both.

I had a seminary professor, Marlene Kropf, who said, “in the economy of God, nothing is wasted.” I have grown into a richer understanding of that over the years. Of course it means that God uses everything that we are willing to share. But there are other implications of that may be obvious to you that took me a while to put together: any gift,

any work, any occupation, any education which is offered with love, is something God can use. And anything that God can use has value. God doesn't love me more because I paid for years of seminary education and I spend a lot of time here at Creekside. I may be a professional pastor, but that doesn't mean I can't be an amateur tomato processor. In fact, someone who processes tomatoes with love -- or at least with a joyful heart, like the folks I saw in the kitchen this past week -- may be closer to the kingdom than a pastor who is murmuring and arguing.

This Labor Day we thank God for our work: the professions which are represented here; learning and experience which have provided livelihood for you and supported others, and earned enough to share with our church. This church could not survive without the financial support and the expertise which all of you share. But God wants more than we can put in an offering plate. God wants more than the time we volunteer the kitchen, on the grounds, or in the community. God wants us to shine like stars in the world; God wants all of our work -- within and outside of these walls to be done with love. In the name of Christ, for the good of Christ's people, for the coming of Christ's kingdom. Amen.