

18th August 2024 – Morning Service
The Value and Vocation of Work
Rev Andrew Roberts
(Prayers adapted from the Methodist Worship Book)

Gathering Prayer

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all. Amen.

StF 682 – God of grace and God of glory

- | | |
|--|---|
| 1) God of grace and God of glory,
On your people pour your power;
Crown your ancient church's story;
Bring her bud to glorious flower.
Grant us wisdom,
Grant us courage,
For the facing of this hour. | 3) Lo, the hosts of evil round us
Scorn your Christ, assail his ways!
Fears and doubts too long have bound us;
Free our hearts to work and praise.
Grant us wisdom,
Grant us courage,
For the living of these days. |
| 2) Heal your children's warring madness;
Bend our pride to your control;
Shame our wanton, selfish gladness,
Rich in things and poor in soul.
Grant us wisdom,
Grant us courage,
Lest we miss your kingdom's goal. | |

Harry Emerson Fosdick © Stephen F Downs CCL No. 515642

Prayer of Adoration

Give us, O God, a vision of your glory, that we may worship you in spirit and in truth, and offer the praise of glad and thankful hearts; through Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

Prayer of Confession

Let us call to mind our sins.
Lord Jesus, you came into the world to save sinners:
Lord, have mercy. **Lord, have mercy.**
We have brought sorrow and hurt to you, to others and to ourselves:
Christ, have mercy. **Christ, have mercy.**
You give yourself to heal and renew us, and to bring us strength:
Lord, have mercy. **Lord, have mercy.**
May almighty God have mercy on us, forgive us our sins, and keep us in life eternal. **Amen.**

StF 47 – Faithful God

Faithful God, Faithful God
All sufficient one,
I worship You.
Shalom my peace,
My strong deliverer,
I lift You up, Faithful God.

Chris Bowater © 1990 Sovereign Lifestyle Music CCL No. 515642

StF 530 – To be in your presence

- 1) To be in Your presence,
To sit at Your feet,
Where Your love surrounds me,
And makes me complete.
- 2) To rest in Your presence,
Not rushing away,
To cherish each moment,
Here I would stay.

Ch) *This is my desire, O Lord,
This is my desire.
This is my desire, O Lord,
This is my desire.*

Noel Richards © 1991 Thankyou Music CCL No. 515642

Reading: Mark 6:1-6

Jesus left there and went to his hometown, accompanied by his disciples. When the Sabbath came, he began to teach in the synagogue, and many who heard him were amazed. “Where did this man get these things?” they asked. “What’s this wisdom that has been given him? What are these remarkable miracles he is performing? Isn’t this the carpenter? Isn’t this Mary’s son and the brother of James, Joseph, Judas and Simon? Aren’t his sisters here with us?” And they took offense at him.

Jesus said to them, “A prophet is not without honour except in his own town, among his relatives and in his own home.” He could not do any miracles there, except lay his hands on a few sick people and heal them. He was amazed at their lack of faith. Then Jesus went around teaching from village to village.

Sermon

Mark’s gospel moves at a rapid rate of knots. Blink and you can easily miss some significant details. Just the other day Martyn Filsak pointed out to me Mark 6:39 where we read

‘Jesus told them to make all the people sit down in groups on the green grass’.

So what we might say, that’s what you do when you are having a picnic. But as Martyn explained this is a clear allusion to the words of the 23rd psalm, confirming Jesus’ identity as the Good Shepherd. The details are important.

At the beginning of chapter 6 we have Mark’s account of Jesus’ return to his home town of Nazareth. We often focus on Jesus’ amazing teaching in the synagogue (verse two) or the famous words of Jesus in verse four, *‘A prophet is not without honour except in his own town’*. Today I would like to pay attention to the verse in the middle of this small passage.

Jesus’ family

In verse three we read of Mary and Jesus’ brothers and sisters. Again, there are some intriguing and illuminating details here. There is no mention of Joseph in Mark. Instead, Jesus is referred to as Mary’s son. Commentators suggest that Joseph may well have died by this time. Then Jesus’ four brothers are named and mention is made of his sisters. We are not told how many sisters there were but given that it is sisters, plural, Mary must have had at least seven children. (In the equivalent account in Matthew 13:56, reference is made to ‘all his sisters’ which suggests there were more than two).

Who does he think he is?

The recorded reaction of the crowd varies a bit across the three equivalent stories in Matthew, Mark and Luke. Effectively they are all different ways of saying ‘who does he think he is?’ But in Luke we have *‘Is not this Joseph’s son’* (Luke 4:22). In Matthew *‘Is this not the carpenter’s son’* (Matthew 13:55). Whilst in Mark we have simply *‘Is not this the carpenter?’* And it is the words in Mark’s account that I would like to reflect on a little bit more.

Isn't this the carpenter?

By the time of this story Jesus was probably around 30 years of age. In the Jewish culture of his time children were deemed to be adults at the age of 13 and under Roman law could marry at 14. So, Jesus had been seen as a man by his culture for a good 16 or 17 years. We know from the gospels that he had spent a lot of time in the synagogues (essential preparation for his itinerant rabbinic ministry) but in all probability he had spent far more time learning the craft and trade of Joseph in the carpenter's workshop.

'Isn't this the carpenter?' the crowds ask, suggesting that Jesus was well known as someone with a trade. The absence of the word 'son' in the question in Mark further suggests that Jesus as the eldest son had inherited the family business, if, as seems likely, Joseph had died by this time. So, Jesus – whose identity we might want to affirm as the Christ, the Son of God, the Word made flesh – had a job, a trade, worked with his hands and ran a business for many more years that he spent preaching and teaching. A significant detail we can so easily overlook. God incarnate worked for a living. God is good and good work is good.

The vocation of work

I can get a bit Victor Meldrew when I hear vocation or calling being talked about exclusively with regard to ordination or other church related roles. To do so is to at best undervalue or, at worst, to disregard the vocations and callings of the majority of people of faith. Carpenters, builders, dentists, doctors, business people, teachers, cleaners, carers (please do add your own vocation to the list) all following in the footsteps of Jesus in having a trade, a role that honours God through the use of God given gifts and serves others.

As a young Christian I remember being deeply impressed when listening to an architect talking about his work as a vocation. I remember writing about it in some piece of school work and saying if perhaps more architects saw their work as a vocation we might have fewer ugly buildings. It was the 1970s when concrete was king and there were some truly awful buildings being built.

Work is good

Work is meant to be good and for good. We must acknowledge that because of human sinfulness (and in particular human greed) sadly for many people and much of the natural world what is meant to be good is bad, sometimes very bad. But that should make us all the more keen to live and spend in such a way that goodness is restored to the world of work and consequentially to the natural world of which we are part.

The Saville Row Tailor, successful businessman and co-presenter of the BBC's Great Sewing Bee argues passionately for the restoration of good work in his seminal book *Less*. He writes:

'[Good] Work is more than money, it is a vital part of our happiness and wellbeing. Work defines us, fulfils us and enriches our lives. It gives structure to our days, a framework to live by, allowing us to plan and shape we wish to take through our years. It gives purpose and binds us to our community, and it allows us to feel that we are useful, that we contribute to the success and that happy functioning of our nation'.

Work supporting ministry

To go back to the Carpenter's shop in Nazareth for a moment. We are not told how the itinerant ministries of Jesus, the twelve and others who accompanied them were funded. No doubt some came from people who were blessed by their ministry. Zacchaeus for example probably put a few coins in a few purses. But it's also very likely that regular support came from the fishing and other businesses of the twelve and entirely possible and plausible that some also came from Joseph and Sons the Carpenters of Nazareth. A reminder that not only is good work intrinsically valuable in itself, it is also valuable for the funding it provides for public goods and services and the ministries it is able to resource.

The godliness is in the detail

So, from one little three-word descriptor in Mark – Jesus the Carpenter – we are reminded of the divine value of good work and the further good work and ministries that can be resourced by such work. Whatever work you are called to do may it be a means of grace to you and through you a means of blessing to others. And if you are now retired may there may be joy in memories of work well done and the good achieved by those labours.

StF 668 – Teach me my God and King

- 1) Teach me, my God and King,
In all things thee to see,
And what I do in anything,
To do it as for thee.
- 2) A man that looks on glass
On it may stay his eye;
Or if he pleaseth, through it pass,
And then the heaven espy.
- 3) All may of thee partake:
Nothing can be so mean,
Which with this tincture, 'For thy sake',
Will not grow bright and clean.
- 4) A servant with this clause
Makes drudgery divine;
Who sweeps a room, as for thy laws,
Makes that and the action fine.
- 5) This is the famous stone
That turneth all to gold;
For that which God doth touch and own
Cannot for less be told.

George Herbert

Prayers of Intercession

God of love, we pray for the life of your Church throughout the world . . .

May every congregation be a community of love and every Christian a witness to your grace. May we be a living fellowship in your Spirit and serve our neighbourhood.

Your kingdom come. **Your will be done.**

God of mercy, we pray for the life of the world . . . and for those who exercise power . . . Show us how to live as members of the human family; to reject the ways of war; to bear each other's burdens and to work together for justice and peace.

Your kingdom come. **Your will be done.**

God of work and creativity, we pray that we may honour you with our work and our giving. We pay for good work for others and for the fair and proper reward of labour. Through our working and our giving may Your kingdom come. **Your will be done.**

God of compassion, we pray for those who are ill or anxious at home or in hospital . . . We pray for those whose lives are filled with fear and despair . . . Draw near with your saving love and bring healing and hope. Your kingdom come. **Your will be done.**

God of glory, we rejoice in the communion of saints; we remember all who have faithfully lived and all who have died in Christian hope, especially . . . Help us to follow their example and bring us with them into the fullness of your eternal joy.

Your kingdom come. **Your will be done.**

Merciful God, you have prepared for those who love you such good things as pass our understanding; pour into our hearts such love towards you that we, loving you above all things, may obtain your promises, which exceed all that we can desire; through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

The Lord's Prayer

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name; thy kingdom come; thy will be done; on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation; but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory for ever and ever. **Amen.**

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us. Save us from the time of trial and deliver us from evil. For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours now and for ever. **Amen.**

StF 39 – Angel voices ever singing

1) Angel voices, ever singing
Round thy throne of light,
Angel harps, for ever ringing,
Rest not day nor night;
Thousands only live to bless thee,
And confess thee
Lord of might.

2) Thou who art beyond the farthest
Mortal eye can scan,
Can it be that thou regardest
Sinful woman, man?
Can we know that thou art near us
And wilt hear us?
Yea, we can.

3) Lord, we know that thou rejoicest
O'er each work of thine;
Thou didst ears and hands and voices
For thy praise design;
Maker's art and music's measure
For thy pleasure All combine.

Francis Pott

Blessing

Now may the blessing of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit be with us, and this world that God loves, this day and for evermore. **Amen.**

4) In thy house, great God, we offer
Of thine own to thee
And for thine acceptance proffer,
All unworthily,
Hearts and minds and hands and voices,
In our choicest Psalmody.

5) Honour, glory, might, and merit
Thine shall ever be,
Father, Son, and Holy Spirit,
Blessed Trinity;
Of the best that thou hast given
Earth and heaven Render thee.