Tomorrow is Labor Day, which is not a religious holiday. It was precipitated by a Pullman Car Company strike in Chicago and a long history of labor disputes in our country. President Cleveland dispatched troops to Chicago where there was rioting and bloodshed until the strike was broken. Labor Day was established to salve those wounds in honor of all those who labor in our country.

On this Sabbath Day, we give thanks for those who labor and pray for those who have no work. The labor of the Church is a different kind of labor – a different kind of work. There is that work one does which is an expression of their life in Christ.

James writes;

14 What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if you say you have faith but do not have works? Can faith save you? 15 If a brother or sister is naked and lacks daily food, 16 and one of you says to them, “Go in peace; keep warm and eat your fill,” and yet you do not supply their bodily needs, what is the good of that? 17 So faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead.

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My mother used to quote this passage from James quite a bit. She had her own version! “Faith without works is dead.” she would say. Looking back, I think she used it to get us tomato our beds! I’m sure it was just a misinterpretation of the text!

The author of this brief letter was likely James, the brother of Jesus, which may explain why Jesus is only mentioned twice in the entire letter! You know how brothers are. It’s not addressed to any particular church, but appears to be a general letter about Christian ethics. It’s a “how-to” letter.

It’s vitally important to James that the Christian faith be more than a set of doctrines, or a body of belief. It must work itself out into real life. It must make a difference. Jesus was James’ older brother. He grew up with him. He knew him. His brother was crucified and risen from the dead. You can’t take this stuff lightly. It matters.
What James is not saying is that you can work your way into heaven. He’s saying heaven must work its way into you. And when it does, you live a different kind of life.

St. Teresa of Avila once wrote,

\[\text{Christ has no body on earth but yours,} \]
\[\text{no hands but yours,} \]
\[\text{no feet but yours.} \]
\[\text{Yours are the eyes through which Christ’s compassion for the} \]
\[\text{world is to look out.} \]
\[\text{Yours are the feet with which he is to go about doing good; and} \]
\[\text{yours are the hands with which he is to bless us now.} \]

James could have written that.

* 

James is the one who wrote, “But be doers of the word, and not merely hearers who deceive themselves.” (1:22) You have to do something in James, not to earn God’s favor, but because you have God’s favor in Christ.

There is a labor to being a Christian. There are “works” that are to be done. Being a Christian can be personal, but it can never be private. Why do we care about the poor? Why would we care about people in Haiti, or in any other country? Why would we care about discrimination or injustice, racism or sexism? Shouldn’t Christians stick to religious things; Bible studies, prayer, covered-dish dinners and such? Not according to James.

**The works, to which James refers, is a life lived in response to God’s grace.** To be in a relationship with God is to care about who and what God cares about. So, in a sense, I am no longer my own person. I belong to Christ, and what comes next is a life of works. It’s a different kind of labor.

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**Labor Day** actually has nothing to do with the Christian faith. It’s not supposed to, but sometimes your life’s work is your service to Christ. I suppose it’s how you look at what you do that makes the difference.

- A **garbage man** can either see his work as a meaningless job or he can see it as a valuable service to his neighbors.
- A **doctor** may or may not see her work as service to Christ. It depends on how and why she does it.
- A **business** person can reflect the ethics of Christ in their business.
• A banker, lawyer, technician, artist, teacher, coach or musician can serve Christ in their daily life and work.
• Folks in construction, the nurse, or the person who stays at home to raise the kids can do what they do as a labor in Christ.
• The woman who took care of my mother while she was dying, singing hymns and reading Scripture to her, could either see her work as a menial task in life, or as her station in the kingdom of God. She saw it as her station in the kingdom.

*It’s a different kind of labor, not the labor that makes only America strong, or brings in a paycheck. It’s the labor of the kingdom of God. You can’t get fired from this job, no matter how old or young you are. In fact, they say the older you are, the better you may be at it! Thank the Lord there is something we do better as we age!*

There are no days off or vacation from this labor. There’s no one location where you go to do it, no time-clock, no retirement. When would your life not be a labor in Christ?

*It’s a different kind of labor. It’s integrated into the fabric of your being. It’s who you are, not what you do. It’s not work, it’s a life.*

*On this Labor Day, we do give thanks for all of those who labor and pray for those who cannot, or in some cases, will not work. But on this day, gathered around this Table of sacrifice and grace, we are most grateful for a different kind of labor, those works that are born out of faith, evidence of the kingdom of God in our midst. For that labor, we give God our thanks and praise.*

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

Congregation: Amen