



## Mount Olive Devotion

The 15th Week of Pentecost (September 7-11, 2020)

### Monday

Exodus 23:10-12

<sup>10</sup>For six years you shall sow your land and gather in its yield; <sup>11</sup>but the seventh year you shall let it rest and lie fallow, so that the poor of your people may eat; and what they leave the wild animals may eat. You shall do the same with your vineyard, and with your olive orchard. <sup>12</sup>Six days you shall do your work, but on the seventh day you shall rest, so that your ox and your donkey may have relief, and your homeborn slave and the resident alien may be refreshed.

As we observe Labor Day today it is good to reflect on the balance that God has gifted us with in the Sabbath command. God undoubtedly honors work by granting us the opportunity of working six out of seven days of the week. But God also grants us rest by commanding Sabbath observance. Notice the benefits of Sabbath observance in the passage above: the land is able to rest from its labor; the poor are given something to eat, as well as the wild animals; the laborer, the beasts of burden, the employee, and even the alien is refreshed. Refreshment – that’s what God desires for us. As a wise person once quipped, “If your output exceeds your input, your upkeep will be your downfall.” Walter Brueggemann, the Old Testament scholar, once said that observing Sabbath is one of the most radical things we can do in this frantic world, for the world does not know how to rest. By receiving this gift of Sabbath, we find that we are indeed refreshed, and the work to which we return is that much more productive.

### Prayer

Thank you, Lord of All, for the gift of labor. Thank you for work that blesses and heals, that supports and educates, that cares and feeds. Thank you for any work which furthers your reign in this world. Thank you also for the gift of Sabbath rest. Grant us faith to receive this gift and be refreshed. In your precious name, we pray. AMEN.

## **Tuesday**

Jeremiah 22:13-17

<sup>13</sup> Woe to him who builds his house by unrighteousness, and his upper rooms by injustice; who makes his neighbors work for nothing, and does not give them their wages; <sup>14</sup> who says, "I will build myself a spacious house with large upper rooms," and who cuts out windows for it, paneling it with cedar, and painting it with vermilion. <sup>15</sup> Are you a king because you compete in cedar? Did not your father eat and drink and do justice and righteousness? Then it was well with him. <sup>16</sup> He judged the cause of the poor and needy; then it was well. Is not this to know me? says the LORD. <sup>17</sup> But your eyes and heart are only on your dishonest gain, for shedding innocent blood, and for practicing oppression and violence.

These fierce words were spoken by the prophet Jeremiah to the sons of King Josiah. Josiah was a good and wise king, but unfortunately, his sons were not. You can hear in this rebuke that Josiah's sons were in the habit of exploiting their workers. They apparently had them building all kinds of extravagant palaces for themselves but then refused to pay them. For this wickedness they received God's stern rebuke. It is instructive for us to understand that a living wage has always been a concern of God's. God is not blind to the injustice of workers who are paid so little that they can have neither sufficient food, medicine, nor shelter. God desires that all honorable labor be compensated fairly and that the rich not exploit the poor, but rather pay them generously for their labor. As we celebrate Labor Day this week, let us remember those who labor in the fields, those who stock the grocery store shelves, those who pick up the garbage, those who clean and cook and launder and repair, and any other workers who often struggle to make ends meet. It is God's intent that all might have sufficiency for their needs.

## **Prayer**

We are sorry, Gracious Lord, for our neglect of those who work without sufficient pay. We confess that, in our eagerness to get a good deal, we have often overlooked the fact that our good deal could be at the expense of another's good living. Grant us wisdom, dear Lord. Grant us hearts that are open and generous. Bless those who labor and grant them justice, we pray. In your Holy Name. AMEN.

## **Wednesday**

Luke 10:1-9

After this the Lord appointed seventy others and sent them on ahead of him in pairs to every town and place where he himself intended to go. <sup>2</sup> He said to them, “The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore ask the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest. <sup>3</sup> Go on your way. See, I am sending you out like lambs into the midst of wolves. <sup>4</sup> Carry no purse, no bag, no sandals; and greet no one on the road. <sup>5</sup> Whatever house you enter, first say, ‘Peace to this house!’ <sup>6</sup> And if anyone is there who shares in peace, your peace will rest on that person; but if not, it will return to you. <sup>7</sup> Remain in the same house, eating and drinking whatever they provide, for the laborer deserves to be paid. Do not move about from house to house. <sup>8</sup> Whenever you enter a town and its people welcome you, eat what is set before you; <sup>9</sup> cure the sick who are there, and say to them, ‘The kingdom of God has come near to you.’

The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few. These are familiar words to us in the Church. Jesus is, of course, talking about the work of the ministry of the Gospel. The phrase, “the harvest is plentiful”, means that the world is ripe for the Gospel. People are needing a word of hope and grace. People are needing to know that God is a God of mercy. People are needing to know that someone cares. We do not need to have a seminary degree to follow this call. Do you know someone who needs a word of hope and grace? Then, bake a dozen cookies, or grab a few tomatoes from your garden, and go over to their home and share a few moments with them. It might make all the difference. Do you know someone who has lived without mercy or lived with an image of God that is harsh and merciless? Then find a way to befriend them and share with them your experience of God’s generous welcome. Laboring in God’s field is something all of God’s people are called to in whatever way we can.

## **Prayer**

Send out laborers into your harvest, Gracious Lord. Send out faithful lay workers, pastors, and deacons to do the work of proclaiming your gospel. Empower all your people to use their gifts to labor in this field as well. Give to all the faithful a mind and heart set on bringing your word of hope to the world. We ask this through Christ our Lord. AMEN.

## Thursday

Ephesians 4:25-29

<sup>25</sup> So then, putting away falsehood, let all of us speak the truth to our neighbors, for we are members of one another. <sup>26</sup> Be angry but do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, <sup>27</sup> and do not make room for the devil. <sup>28</sup> Thieves must give up stealing; rather let them labor and work honestly with their own hands, so as to have something to share with the needy. <sup>29</sup> Let no evil talk come out of your mouths, but only what is useful for building up, as there is need, so that your words may give grace to those who hear.

This passage has an interesting audience. Among those who are addressed are thieves. Remembering that this letter was written to people who are part of a fledgling Christian congregation, it is interesting to think that that roster included thieves. Perhaps it is true that all church rosters include thieves, but we generally don't think of that. In any case, note what the writer exhorts them to: "Labor and work honestly with [your] hands, so as to have something to share with the needy." It is not merely to have enough for one's needs that we labor, but so that we might have enough to share, says the writer. This is a reminder to us as well. Our labor is not given to us solely that we can provide enough for our own needs, but we are given our work so that the needy may also have enough. We don't often think of that. It is apparently God's plan that the excess that some have been given is to be shared with those who have less than they need. In that way, a balance in society is insured. This is God's wisdom.

## Prayer

Thank you, God of All, that you do not desert us in our sins, but you grant us amendment of life again and again. Bless those who have been incarcerated and are now working their way back to a productive life. Give them good success in their return to honest work. Thank you that the work we are given can be used to provide help for those in need. Give us generous hearts. Give us willing spirits to help any in need. We pray this in the Name of Jesus, our Savior. AMEN.

## **Friday**

James 5:7-11

<sup>7</sup> Be patient, therefore, beloved, until the coming of the Lord. The farmer waits for the precious crop from the earth, being patient with it until it receives the early and the late rains. <sup>8</sup> You also must be patient. Strengthen your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is near. <sup>9</sup> Beloved, do not grumble against one another, so that you may not be judged. See, the Judge is standing at the doors! <sup>10</sup> As an example of suffering and patience, beloved, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord. <sup>11</sup> Indeed we call blessed those who showed endurance. You have heard of the endurance of Job, and you have seen the purpose of the Lord, how the Lord is compassionate and merciful.

Whenever we think of laborers we dare not forget the farmer in the field. There are none that work harder and are more vulnerable to the vagaries of nature than they. Farmers can plan and plant and wait and watch, only to have their crops blown down a month before harvest by a powerful derecho. Farmers can be wise and prudent in all their dealings, fair with all their workers, and yet receive a price for their crop which is well below what they need. Farmers can be faithful to God, and yet find that unscrupulous persons with whom they must deal sometimes come out on top. Yet, it is also true that farmers are in a rare position to watch God's creation unfold. Who else but the farmer can wake in the morning and see a glorious field of grain and know that one's work is feeding the world? Who else but the farmer can see a calf born or a piglet raised or pick an egg from the nest of a hen? Who else but the farmer can labor day after day and know the pleasure of producing the food and fuel that the world needs? Yes, the burdens of being a farmer are many, but so are the blessings. We thank God for every faithful man or woman who has put their hand to the plow.

## **Prayer**

God of fields and vineyards, we give you thanks for the farmers amongst us. We give you thanks that through their hands the world is fed. We give you thanks that their labor is not in vain. Grant them a fair price for their crops, health and strength to do their work, and a sure sign of your presence, that they might take joy in all their labor. We pray this through Christ our Lord. AMEN.