

Theme: God at Work

Text: Philippians 2:13 (ESV)

13 ...for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure.

When someone asks you, “What do you do for a living?” How do you usually respond? Don’t we usually respond with, “I am... an engineer, or police officer, or in your case, Rebecca, a teacher.” We don’t respond by saying, “I do engineering,” or “I do law enforcement,” or “I do teaching”—even though that’s what we were asked, right? “What do you do for a living?”

Have you ever wondered why we respond that way? Well, I guess it could just be a figure of speech that we’ve grown accustomed to saying (after all, it does sound kind of strange—and rather uneducated to say, “I do teaching.” Probably not what you’re shooting for if you are a teacher! ☺).

But another reason might be because our **work** is such a big part of our lives. We invest a tremendous amount of time and energy into our **work**. Oftentimes, even much of our identity comes from our **work**. “I am a teacher...or lawyer...or engineer...or pastor.” This is especially true if we are talking about a job that we would describe as being our “career,” or our *vocation*. Did you know that the word “vocation” comes from the Latin word *vocare*, which means “to call.”

Now, a big part of our worship service today is the installation of our new teacher in our Christian Day school, Rebecca Lillo. We often describe work in the teaching and preaching ministry as a “calling.” In fact, when we offer the position of teacher or pastor in our church or school we describe it as a “call” to teach or to preach. So, Rebecca, for you, and me, and Miss Gullerud, those whose occupations involve a divine “call” from God through His people, it’s pretty obvious that what God says about our **work** in His Word applies to us. It’s also quite obvious that He is involved in our **work** and the **work** that we do glorifies Him and helps to further His kingdom. We are using His Word to teach and instruct His people and spread His saving message, so it’s pretty obvious that God is at **work** in our **work**.

But what about the rest of you here today? Is **God at Work** in your **work**? The answer, when we look at our sermon text for this special service, and when we look at the rest of Scripture is a resounding: Yes! We pray that the Holy Spirit would bless the words of our message today that they would be applicable, encouraging, and faith-strengthening to everyone, no matter what your line of **work**.

First of all, let’s recognize and realize the importance of **work** in our lives and in our world. **Work** is a gift from God! It really is! God gave Adam and Eve the job of cultivating the Garden of Eden and exercising dominion over the world even *before* sin entered the world (**Genesis 2:15**). Obviously, since the fall into sin, like everything in this fallen world, **work** is no longer the perfect gift God intended it to be—far from it! It is not always the fulfilling, beneficial, joyful service that God desires it to be. **Work** can be tedious, it can be stressful, it can be mundane—it can be downright awful at times! Yes, even for pastors and teachers; called workers in God’s kingdom. But let’s keep in mind that our **work**—no matter what our vocation is—really is a blessing from God!

As one person once put it, “In vocation [our **work**], God is hidden even in the mundane activities of our everyday lives” (Einar Billing). Think about it, God most often works through regular, physical means, and therefore He most often bestows His earthly gifts by means of human **work**. Whenever someone does something for you—makes you a meal, cleans your house, teaches your children, preaches a sermon, or develops software for your iPhone to work properly so that you can post your super cute selfie to Instagram immediately after you take it—be grateful for the people God uses to bless you through their **work**!

When you think about it, our **work** (and where we work) is actually one of the major means by which God gives us opportunities to show our love for Him and our neighbor, as He commands us: “**And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.’ The second is this: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ There is no other commandment greater than these” (Mark 12:30-31 ESV)**. Martin Luther once wrote about the connection between our **work** and our love for God and our neighbor. He wrote,

- “A Christian lives not in himself, but in Christ and the neighbor. He lives in Christ through faith, and in his neighbor through love.”
- “Good works are not to be done for God. Rather, they must be done for one’s neighbor. God does not need our good works, but our neighbor does. (Martin Luther)

So, the question is: Is **God at Work** in and through us when we are at **work**? He is. But maybe He’s a bit more hidden by us than He ought to be? If we think of the **work** we do each day—whether it’s at home, at school, in an office, or on an assembly line—as the “ministry” God has given us, won’t that change the way we look at our work? The word “ministry” means *service*. In a very real sense, our work is the “ministry” (“service”) God has given us. “Ministry” as defined in the New Testament ministry is any service performed by a Christian that is motivated and empowered by the Holy Spirit that benefits men and brings glory to God. That is why the Apostle Paul could write, **“Therefore, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God” (1 Corinthians 10:31).**

How can we bring **“glory to God”** through our **work**? Scripture consistently teaches that whatever our work—whether it’s saving souls through the teaching and preaching of His Gospel, or cleaning toilets—we should work with diligence, excellence, and self-sacrifice that honors Him and serves others. Jesus once said, **“Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven” (Matthew 5:16).** Think of how brightly Christ’s light shines in our life to the world around us when we do our work with:

- † Integrity
- † Diligence
- † Excellence and skill
- † Thankfulness
- † and Love! (**“Let all that you do be done with love.” – 1 Corinthians 16:14**)

Our work becomes “service,” and in fact, “worship” to God when we dedicate it to Him and perform it to His glory and with an awareness that **God is at Work** with us and through us.

Now, none of this would really even be possible or even desirable to us if it weren’t for the fact that **God is at Work in us**, and **for us**! Remember the words of our sermon text: **“...for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure” (Philippians 2:13).** It is God who gives you the motivation (the “want to”), and the ability to carry out the **work** He has given you today. May that be a comfort and a source of strength to all of us, and especially to you today, Rebecca, as you approach the overwhelming responsibility—yet blessed privilege—of teaching Jesus’ little lambs in our school! **“It is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure” (Philippians 2:13).** Doesn’t that take the pressure off of you? He places that responsibility on Himself to give you the desire and ability to carry out His work and His purpose!

That is part of His grace! That is the most important part of His **work for us**! It has nothing to do with our work, but with Jesus’ **work**! **“For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast” (Ephesians 2:8-9 NIV).** His perfect **work**, His perfect life, His innocent death on the cross to pay for our sins, His glorious resurrection from the grave—that **work** is what earned us forgiveness, God’s unending love, and eternal life with Him in heaven! In fact, God now counts our **work**—as flawed and as tainted as it is—as **“righteous;”** perfect in His sight! As the Apostle Paul once put it, **“And to the one who does not work but believes in him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is counted as righteousness” (Romans 4:5 ESV).**

My prayer for you, Rebecca, and all of us, as we go about our **work** is the prayer that the Apostle Paul prayed for the Philippian Christians in the chapter that comes right before our sermon text:

“I thank my God every time I remember you. ⁴In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy ⁵because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now, ⁶being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus” (Philippians 1:3-6 NKJV). Amen.