

**Centre Congregational Church, United Church of Christ  
The Reverend Dr Scott Everett Couper  
Sunday, November 14, 2021  
Twenty-fifth Sunday after Pentecost in Ordinary Time**

**“Rooted in Work”**

**Second of a three-part sermon series entitled “Rooted in Love”**

**Christian Scripture: Romans 12:9-21**

Work. I think for most of us, from about the age of 16 to almost 70, work is the major preoccupation of most of our lives. I have a couple of ‘ha-has’ to share with you about work.

After many years of trying to find steady work, I finally got a job as a historian until I realized there was no future in it.

I had a job at MinuteMaid orange juice. I got fired because I couldn’t concentrate.

My best job was being a musician, but eventually, I found I wasn’t noteworthy.

I just lost my job as a psychic. Boy, I did not see that coming.<sup>1</sup>

Many can rightfully argue that work is, for good or for bad, the defining element of our lives. Work is how I spend most of my time. I spend more hours

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<sup>1</sup> Guest, “50 Jokes about Career Search & Job Search”, *Undercover Recruiter*, found at: <https://theundercoverrecruiter.com/career-jokes/>, accessed November 13, 2021.

working than sleeping, more time working than spending time with my family, and more time working than ‘worshiping’ (be it in prayer, silence, meditation, or services). In terms of recreation, I only watch a couple hours of sport and run for about six or seven hours a week. I spend more of my year working than on vacation, that’s for sure.

I would also argue that what is true for our lives is also true for our faith. In terms of practicing our faith, work is a chief means to glorify, praise, and enjoy God.<sup>2</sup> It may seem strange for me to say, but most of our time at church is spent working, for good or bad. The industry of many of our members is astounding. Easily into their eighties, many of our members work as if they are employed by church. That is not necessarily lamentable. I believe we glorify God when we do that which God gifts us to do. When we work to fulfill God’s will, we are stewards of that which God had given us.<sup>3</sup> Peter’s carpentry skills and fixing windows are as much a gift of God as his financial resources. Nan’s gift of administration and nurturing children is as much a gift from God as her financial resources. Heidi’s horticultural prowess is as much a gift from God as her financial resources. Sometimes we think we are stewards of only financial resources – we will speak of

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<sup>2</sup> “Glorifying God in Our Work”, taken from Mark D. Roberts, *Life for Leaders*, a Devotional Resource of the DePree Leadership Center at Fuller Theological Seminary, Sermon Illustrations, The Pastor’s Workshop, found at: <https://thepastorsworkshop.com/sermon-illustrations-2/sermon-illustrations-work/>, accessed November 13, 2021.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

this next week. But more often than not within the context of ministry, we are stewards of time and talents that should be measured and dispensed wisely to the glory of God.

Within the context of church, work can be a double-edged sword. I believe work requires two things: energy and fulfillment. Often in church one or both of these ingredients are missing. We can often feel obligated to work in the church but not feel spiritually nourished. When this happens, our tank runs dry. We feel emptied and burnt-out. This is why worship, prayer, and silence are so important. These things replenish us. Often church work becomes almost entirely, administration, budgets, and meetings. Paul Nickerson reminds us that while these are needed, we must be careful that 'bureaucracy' is not the work of the church. When work is only bureaucracy, there is little fulfillment, little pleasure, and it does not reflect the gifts and talents that God provides us – unless you are those rare few like Anne with figures and Bill with parliamentary rules.

We began this series by focusing on wisdom. Wisdom concentrates on discerning what work we do to God's glory. Next week, we will examine wealth. Wealth funds or fuels our work. It remains that being 'Rooted in Work' is our primary condition in the church.

This coming week, I would like you to really pray and meditate on Pope Francis' quote printed on your service order. "You pray for the hungry. Then you

feed them. That's how prayer works." Wisdom is discerning what is God's will for us to do. Work is feeding. Wealth is the cost of that feeding. And worship provides the strength, inspiration, and endurance to feed.

Our scripture reading from Romans I think captures the centrality that work has in our faith lives – yet, it is surrounded and fed by a loving spirit and prayerful attitude. The apostle Paul stated that a key Christian objective is “to serve the Lord with unflagging energy, in ardor and spirit” (Romans 12:11). Energy can only be unflagging if it is fueled with worship, prayer, and silence (Romans 12:12) – and these are best practiced by the observation of the Sabbath. Paul advised to give drink to those who thirst and feed those who are hungry (Romans 12:19-20) as we do through our Loaves & Fishes ministry, our support of Groundworks Collaborative, and our partnership with the Help Fund.

Friends, if you wonder what work you can do so that your faith is deepened and your devotion to God demonstrated, please speak with me or a ministry chair to discern how it is that you may contribute the gifts that God has given to you as a tithe to our church's stewardship campaign.

This was the Word of God. And it was delivered to the People of God. And the People of God responded, “Amen!”