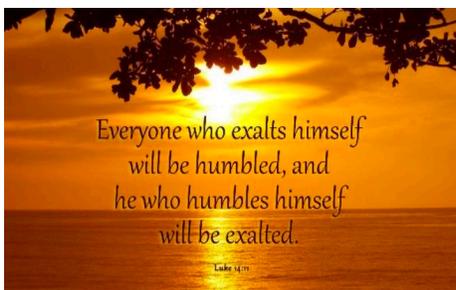


Sunday, August 31, 2025

12th Sunday after Pentecost

So today, we gather in a sense to celebrate Labor Day, a special day that has been set aside to recognize the hard work, the sweat, the dreams of everyday people. This holiday is more than just a long weekend or an excuse to relax. It's an opportunity to honor the dignity and holiness of work and reflect on the values that can make our community stronger in our future's brighter. The gift of work begins in the opening pages of the Bible, doesn't it not, with Genesis, with the story of God working, God creating the universe, creating humanity, even creating rest. The human being created in the image of God is created for holy work, and God in fact places the human into one, into the paradise and blesses them and commands them, be fruitful and multiply, have stewardship over creation and dominion over the fish of the sea, the birds of the air, and every living thing that moves on earth. God's vision of perfect stewardship and care, as we know, is marred by the original sin of Adam and Eve, which results that toil and curse become part of the picture of work. Because of sin, now greed enters the picture and the balance in the beauty of work is thrown completely out of whack. Let's just look at work in the last 100 years or so. Workers have had to labor up to 16 hours a day, six days a week. They worked in unsafe factories with little pay and no benefits. Children worked in despicable conditions, and the bosses didn't worry if someone got sick or hurt. There was someone else that would take their place. They only cared about making money. But because of the efforts of worker protests and the influence of the social gospel movement at that day, we now have lost the protect worker rights. The eight-hour work day, weekends, off, workplace safety standards, and the right to organize all came from that labor movement and that social gospel movement. However, we still live in an unbalanced work situation caused by human greed and sin. The wealth inequality in our country is reaching levels that have last been seen since the Great Depression. Pay is not kept up with the rate of inflation. Costs of healthcare and housing and food, skyrocketed workers find themselves underpaid, needing two incomes to get by, working second jobs,

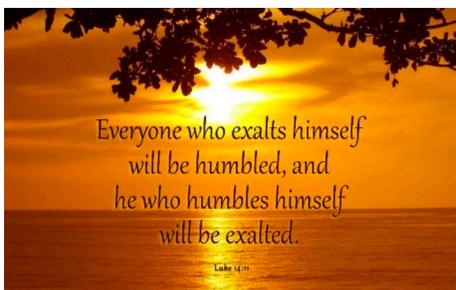


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many under employed. I read somewhere that 70 percent of the population have been stressed out by inflation that have outstripped wage growth and a third reported that their financial circumstances has deteriorated. Have you read something similar? I'm sure we've all read things like this. So today, as we look, consider our readings, and Labor Day, we are invited to confess this imbalance of God's vision caused by human greed and sin and to recommit ourselves to the vision of care and holy stewardship found in the Scriptures. There are three verses, three ideas in our Scriptures today that guide us to restore the dignity and holiness that God wants us to find in work. The epistle to the Hebrews flatly tells us, "Keep your lives free from the love of money." Elsewhere in the Bible, we hear that the love of money is the root of all evil. And we also can't surrogate and man at the same time. The Scriptures in September will be leading us deeper into these ideas and the problems of unbalanced wealth. Because the Bible isn't suggesting that it's wrong to have money or that it's wrong to be affluent. The ethics of the Bible is an ethics of stewardship that we are not, that giving blessings just to enjoy it ourselves and increase our own wealth to levels that can possibly not spend in our lifetime. No, we are blessed with riches, according to the Scriptures, in order to bless others, to engage in proper stewardship of the earth and care of creation, including all our brothers and sisters of the world. There are over 2,000 Scriptures that warn us about the abundance of possessions, about the potential for wealth to cause temptation, to lead to arrogance and distance from God, to foster greed and make it difficult in the end to enter the kingdom of God.

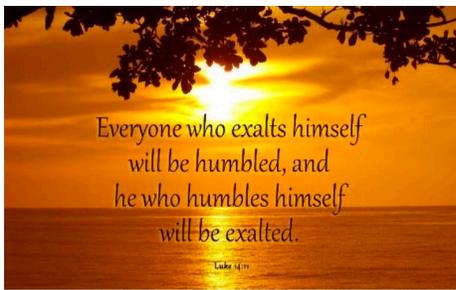
So how do we remedy this? Two key words from our Scriptures today guide us. Hospitality that we heard from in Hebrews and humility, humility that Jesus talked about in our parables today. Hospitality is more than just opening up our homes, it's opening up our hearts and our lives to others, especially those who are marginalized, who is the stranger among us. When



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we welcome others with kindness and generosity, we mirror the welcoming heart of Christ, who received all who came to Him. Hospitality breaks down barriers, creates community, it fosters understanding and respect and peace among people, all different backgrounds. And when we engage in hospitality, whether it's feeding the hungry, advocating for the oppressed or building equitable systems, we do this because the Bible teaches us that this is what is the foundation of being a hospitable person. Without a spirit of welcome and inclusion, our efforts become hollow or just self-serving. Equally essential is humility. Jesus in His parables today says practicing humility is a must. Humility is recognizing that our strength **and** wisdom come from God, not from ourselves. It's a posture of the heart that enables us to listen deeply, to learn from others and to acknowledge our own shortcomings. In the pursuit of justice, humility guards us against pride, arrogance and the temptation to dominate, to be number one. It calls us rather to serve rather than be served. Jesus Himself is the ultimate model of humility because He made Himself nothing by taking on the very nature of a servant. So when we approach life with humility, we align ourselves with God's kingdom values about justice rooted in love and service. So when you see when hospitality and humility come together, they create this fertile soil for holy work, work that reflects God's justice and mercy. Hospitality opens the door, humility opens the heart. Hospitality welcomes the stranger and humility helps us listen and learn. Hospitality shares resources, humility shares power. Most and holy work cannot thrive without both. To be just is to treat others fairly and with dignity. To be holy is to set aside a part for God's purposes. So, hospitality and humility make this possible because it shapes our attitudes and our actions to be in line with the love of Jesus. Ron Garen, who was an astronaut, an author and humanitarian, explains how if more of us wanted, could, if more of us developed what he calls a planetary perspective, we could fix what ails humanity in the planet. Now this Garen spent 178 days in space. He traveled more than 71 million miles in 2842 orbits around the



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earth. From that higher above, he recognized something that the planet is more fragile than we think it is. And he looked out the window from that international space station. He witnessed earth from a vision that few of us have. He saw the flashes of lightning, the glowing curtains of the auras and the most haunting thing to him was the thinness of our atmosphere. He saw that there were no geopolitical boundaries, no class or race or wealth boundaries from the perspective of space. Just one beautiful, fragile planet. He believes it's time that we had a radical shift of thinking. Instead of putting economy first, he argues we need to reverse our order. So our priorities become the care and the stewardship of the planet, care and healing of our society, and then the needs of the economy. Instead of economic gain always being number one and first in our minds. Garen states if humanity, if humanity is to survive and thrive, the message is clear. He says we're all crewmates on this planet ship earth and it's time we started to act like it. So, this labor day, as we rest and celebrate, let us remember that God values hospitality, humility and love above all. Whether we are working or not, how we treat others reveals our true character.

So, let's humble ourselves like Jesus and serve others with affection and kindness and be hospitable to them. In doing this, we give glory to God and we help to build a better world where every worker, no matter what they're doing, is honored. Every person is loved. Every stranger is welcomed and we become one world, one home, one family on this one planet created in the image of a loving God. That is what work does and that's the kind of work that makes a difference for all of God's people and that is a Labor Day we can truly celebrate. Amen