

**Christ Presbyterian Church
Edina, Minnesota
January 25 & 26, 2014
Rich Phenow
The Calling of Work
John 13:34-35; Colossians 3:17, 23-24**

Let me introduce myself. My name is Rich Phenow. I'm on the care team of this church. As you know, we've been journeying through a 3-week series on God and work, discovering why our work matters to God. John Crosby kicked this off two weeks ago talking about how God modeled work to us when He created the world and created us. He showed us what work looked like and He said work was good. Then there was the fall, and we know that work became hard and difficult for many. And last week Steph Spencer did a wonderful job talking about our identity in Christ and about the reality of the tensions in work.

This week I'm going to dovetail with what you just witnessed in that wonderful video, those honest stories of people's calling in the midst of their workplaces. It wasn't until late yesterday after I prepared my message that I actually saw this video for the first time. I was amazed at how much the things that were rolling through my mind paralleled the words in the video. Just a few highlights: Calling is a place of alignment. It's kind of this magical, mystical place where we're personally in the hard things in people's lives, in their divorces, in the loss of their jobs, in the loss of their homes. It's a call to take care of people in the hard places in people's lives. It's a call to look and listen and see opportunities to minister to those in need. It's a place where it's not about *us*.

I don't know about you but often when we meet someone for the first time, especially at a party or a social gathering, what's one of the first questions we ask, or maybe the second or third? "What do you do for work?" "How do you make a living?" "What's your career?" And then what happens is we all make certain assumptions about those people, don't we? Now for example, whenever I go to see somebody in a psychiatric ward, there is usually the reality that there are some restrictions. I'll come to the front desk and the nurse or social worker will say, "Family and clergy can visit. Are you family?" I say *no*, and I can hear the next question in their minds. Some actually verbalize it. "Your not CLERgy are you?" I whip out my billfold and show my identification. This Friday afternoon during a service, a woman came up to me and called me "Father." I knew the context of that and so I said to her, "Ma'am, I'm not your father." She said, "Well, what do I call you? Reverend or Pastor?" I said, "I am really comfortable with Rich." She asked why and I said, "Because otherwise I think you have a whole bunch of expectations of me that I can't meet."

Isn't it true that we define people by what they do? But in the Body of Christ, we are not defined by what we do. We are defined by who we are and by whose we are. Who we are is a prized child of God, holy and dearly beloved. That's who we are. That's how we define each other as children of God. We are brothers and sisters with one another. We have been grafted into the

family of God by Jesus and so that's who we are. We are not what we do, regardless of what that is. We are who we are because of God and we are His children.

As I've reflected back on the many jobs I've had over the years, I can tell you about them, my first job was when I was five years old. Every Saturday I had to work on the Phenow family work day. It was not a day for fun. It was a work day, but I don't want to tell you about all that. I just want to tell you a few of the jobs that I have had. I was a paperboy. I was a house painter, both through college and graduate school. I worked as a commercial fisherman in Alaska for awhile. I was a youth minister for a number of years. I was a marriage and family counselor. Then for some of you, I've been privileged to do ministry in this church. I was a window washer and I was a janitor, but what I've discovered is that my heart beats the fastest and the hardest when I'm invited to come alongside of others in difficult situations. I feel I don't deserve to be there but I am *asked* to be there. That's when my heart beats fastest. My heart also beats fast whenever I'm in a place where we can equip and train and encourage others, where we can empower people to do ministry, to act on the priesthood of all believers. That pumps me up. I get fired up and feel great alignment with God when I'm training and equipping. Those are the sweet spots for me. All of us have a desire for meaning in our call; whether our call is our job or not, we want to be purposeful. We want to have meaning.

In 2013 there was a survey that discovered that in the 1980s, 61 percent of Americans felt satisfaction in their jobs, that their jobs had purpose and meaning. Recently that same survey was given and the results showed that less than 30 percent of us feel good about what we're doing. I had breakfast this week with a guy, a financial advisor. This is a guy who enjoys his work and he's good at it. He likes the people that he serves. It was fascinating to be with this friend of mine because I could visually see his blood pressure going up as he spoke to me, but he wasn't speaking about his job as a financial advisor. He was talking about being on the board of Hospitality House. This guy got all fired up in front of me. He got all animated. He said, "I have brains. I have ideas. I'm on this board." It's a non-profit ministry that teaches and develops under-privileged youth, and this guy is fired up. I had to say to him, "Hey, settle down a little bit. I'm worried about you blowing a gasket." This guy was so excited. Why? Because this is a place of call for him. It's a place where he can use his gifts now to make a difference.

I want you to watch this video with me for a few seconds. It's a video of a man named Bob Goff who's written a book called *Love Does*. I would encourage you to read this book because it's incredible. We heard Bob speak for the first time at the leadership summit at Willow Creek [Church in Chicago]. I want you to just listen to *this* fired-up guy talk about call.

[Video begins.]

I want to move from just agreeing with Jesus to *doing* stuff. It was always a lawyer who was trying to set up Jesus, right? They said like, "What's the big Commandment." And it was like, "Love God with all your heart and mind and love your neighbor." I've got a little yellow stick'em on my bathroom mirror in San Diego and it says three things. It says, "Love God, love people, and do stuff." You want to want your businesses grow, in the faith community, in church, in your neighborhood? Just do stuff.

This guy talked to me and asked Lindsey Goff [my daughter] if he could marry her. I told Lindsey ever since she was bigger than a trout, "Someday some guy is going to want to marry you and if I like that guy, he and I will build a chapel for you, together. And if I don't

like the guy, we'll just never get around to it." [Bob laughs.] But this guy talked to me and for the last 2½ months, we've been building this chapel together. Here's why. Do you know why I did it? I don't want a son-in-law and you don't want employees. I want a friend and you know what? When I did stuff, I got one, and he's terrific. The more times I just do stuff, things happen but we've got to figure out, what is the right stuff to do?

You guys are able to do so many things. The real question is this. What were you made to do? Do a *lot* of that. You guys could put a shuttlecraft together in here if we started passing out the parts. You are able to because you are so high-functioning, but what I'm trying to do is tie down what it is that Jesus has made me to do? Man, if I do a bunch of that, then I'll be a leader.

Ephesians 4: Paul is in a jail cell. He says to his friends, "Live a life worthy of the calling you've received. Now don't you live his [life] and don't you live hers and come off like this bad Elvis impression. Live a life worthy of the calling *you've* received." When we do that stuff, it changes everything because some of us believe this lie, some of the people who work for us whom we're leading, believe this lie that we are our biggest mistake like, somehow we are defined by who we *used* to be.

You guys can keep your iPhones. *This* is a real camera. [Holds up a Polaroid.] [Everybody laughs.] Okay, all right. Here, smile. [Click.] Remember these things. The film costs like 30 bucks a shot now. Remember when you had a paper route? But remember how these things develop over time? Like, if you want to figure out what it is that you were made to be, as a leader in your community, in all the places God put you right now, let it develop over time. I want to rush it. [Deep-breaths, huffs and puffs.] I want to just like, do it, but you end up blowing it when you try to rush it. Just let it develop over time. That's the thing. Remember,

¹². . . we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face [1st Corinthians 13:12].

It's going to come into focus for us but it's going to take a little time.

[Video ends.]

That guy makes me look subdued! Live a life worthy of your calling as you perceive it. It's interesting that Bob is a lawyer, but do you know what his real calling is? He's created a ministry called Restore International. It's a non-profit that fights injustice against children in Uganda and India. *That's* his calling. He's a lawyer to support his calling. A call is what we were made to do. It develops over time. Once we discover it, then we've got to *do* stuff. It's a place where God has wired us and connects deeply to our souls. It's when God is using all of our talents, that unique gifting, our intellects, our abilities, our passions, to serve God and to serve others. And when we realize it, *shazam! Golleluia!* We're right in the sweet spot that God created us to be in! I love Frederick Buechner. He's one of my favorite writers and he said it this way.

The kind of work God usually calls you to is the kind of work (*a*) that you need most to do and (*b*) that the world most needs to have done.

The place God calls you to is the place where your deep gladness and the world's deep hunger meet.

Whether our call is in the workplace or outside, we are called to exercise two key Biblical principles, to serve and to love like Jesus. This is the calling for all of us in every place in our lives, whether we are tired or RE-tired, it doesn't matter. It comes first to us in Paul's words in Colossians, chapter 3.

17 And whatever you do,

whatever your calling is,

whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

23 Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for human masters

Do it with all of your heart. Why? Because we're working for the Lord. He's our boss, not man. It's all about an audience of one. Whatever we say or do, wherever we are, our words and actions are to reflect Jesus to others because we're trying to do it in His Name. We are to become mirrored reflections of Jesus to others. Are the folks in our daily lives seeing in us a picture of Jesus, a reflection of Him? If we took on that image, there wouldn't be as much competition, as much pride and as much comparing ourselves to someone else, always wondering how we're doing, because we're doing it for the audience of one.

Paul says in Philippians 2, that Jesus

6 Who, being in very nature God . . . **7** . . . made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant

Even though Jesus was God, He took on the nature of a servant and did stuff. **We are called to be servants** and do stuff. We are to give encouragement. We are to listen to our fellow workers. We are to see the pain of those in the elevator of our senior complex and engage in that. We're to write a note, bring a loaf of bread, visit the sick, and visit our neighbor.

The second Biblical principle is **we are called to love others like Jesus loved us**. These very words of Jesus are found in John 13.

34 "A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another.

What Jesus is saying is that we are to love others as much as He loves us. In a radical, countercultural, sacrificial way, we are to be copycats of Jesus. "Love one another as I have loved you" is the simplest, clearest, and hardest command of all. What does that look like? Minutes earlier, Jesus was on His knees with a towel and a bowl of water, washing the feet of His disciples, a real-life example of humble, servant love. We're to figuratively wash the feet of those around us. Love is all about the *other* and not the *only*, who look like us and think like us, who reinforce our world and make us feel comfortable. We're to come alongside of those in pain, be a non-anxious presence and listen with our ears and hearts, not trying to fix everyone. It's about loving those we've judged because of what their job is. It is about loving those who

look different from us and act different from us and believe different from us. We are called to love the marginalized and the forgotten and all people.

It's more than a love of warm feelings. It's a calling that plays itself out in actions. It's alive when you show up in hard places, in scary places, with the right heart. It's being there when it's not convenient. It's walking alongside those in hopeless pain, reminding them they're not alone. It's giving when it hurts. It doesn't matter if we are a lawyer or a student, it doesn't matter if we are retired, we have the same call, to serve God by serving others, by looking like Jesus and living like Him. Jesus says,

35 By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another."

I'd like to invite a friend of mine to come up here, a woman who's only been involved in our church for about a year. Her name is Judy Pehrson. Judy came to our church in late December a year ago. She came here for the first time because of a horrible tragedy, an unexpected event in her life. I want to ask Judy a little bit about that event and ask her to tell us about some of the things that followed.

[Judy Pehrson:] Okay. In December of 2012 I took my three boys to southern California for a Christmas holiday break. The first night there, my 23-year-old son was hit by a car and he was killed instantly. My 20-year-old son was with him. My 6-year-old son and I were in the hotel room. It was right in front of the hotel. It just basically stops your world at a moment like that and, really, nothing at that point really matters any more. Everything as you knew it is different. We were sitting outside at the accident scene for hours with the police trying to reconstruct what happened. I remember staring at this car that hit him, thinking, "God, I need help more than I ever needed it before." It just was a different thing. I've asked for a lot of help for little things and also for big things but this one was bigger than even me, and I knew I needed something. I didn't know how I was going to get it but I knew I needed something bigger if I was going to be able to go on.

[Rich Phenow:] Judy, through her sister Vickie called CPC because Vickie had heard that this is a place where we would love people in moments like this. We ended up having Andrew's service here on a Saturday morning. It was really the second time that Judy had been in our church and her family had never been here before. Judy, tell us about some of the ways that impacted you and ways that people here served you and cared for you.

[Judy:] I had lived in Minnesota for six years and I drove up Highway 100 every day but I didn't even know this church existed. I was mentally somewhere else or on a conference call or just somewhere else, so it was amazing to find that CPC had been right here the whole time. It was during the holidays. A lot of people were on breaks and yet CPC stopped everything to make this work for us. Rich made it work. He met with our family to give us the service we wanted. We wanted to make sure it was bright and uplifting and that it had an amazing band. The band members moved their schedules around to make sure they could be there. It was just incredible how many people who didn't know us, who didn't know anything about us, who knew we weren't members of the church, did everything to make us feel like family and make us feel like we really mattered. It just made such a difference.

[Rich:] The sanctuary was full of young adults and high schoolers. I remember a whole section over here. They actually cried more, used up more Kleenex, than any service we have ever had here before at the church. Then, amazingly, Judy shows up the next morning along with some of Andrew's friends. Saturday is the service. Sunday Judy is here. This church really served and really cared, through Rich Larson and the music, through Bill Davis and our grief ministry team. All these people just showed up and served Judy and her family in this horrible, difficult time. Tell us about some other ways, some relationships that you've developed and places that you've engaged.

[Judy:] Rich connected me with Meg. She had been through a loss several years ago and asked if I wanted to go to lunch. She just knew what I was going through and knew that I would need some additional support above and beyond our family. As much as I have a great extended family that helped, they were grieving, too, so it was really nice to have her to lean on. In addition to taking me to lunch, she found another grief group for me that dealt with just children. It was in Golden Valley and she got me the name of it, the day of the meetings, the directions, and then she babysat for my son, so I didn't have to do anything other than just show up and kind of be ministered to. It made a big, huge difference. She would send me an email. She would send me a card. She would send me a text or call me at just what seemed like the right time, some of the first times without him, the one-year anniversary, his birthday, his college graduation, Easter, Christmas, some of those times. She always just knew when I might need that extra support and she was there for me. It was really neat.

[Rich:] Judy has been here almost every Sunday with Alex, her youngest son, ever since. In fact, a couple of weeks ago, they were in Florida and Alex said, "Mom, Pastor Rich is going to be mad at us." She said, "Why?" and he said, "Because we are not at church this Sunday." There's a kid right there that gets it! Judy, you've built relationships. You're here all the time. It's so great to have you here as part of our family, but tell us where you engaged with the church this fall, in November.

[Judy:] Meg had mentioned to me that she had gone to Zambia, Africa several years ago. She told me a little bit about the mission trips. I'd always wanted to go on one but when she extended the offer to me to go to Zambia in November, I jumped on it. I decided it was time to do something different, and it was like everyone says, an experience of a lifetime. It was one of those life-changing things to see people who are just so terribly different from you and have so much less and yet, they are grateful. They are amazing people. It was a great trip.

[Rich:] When I asked Judy to do this, I told her it would take great courage, and she said, "I really want to do it, Rich, because I want to thank people," and she said, "and because I am in the midst of discovering God's call in my life, where I might serve and love others." Like she has been loved!

Let's pray.

Holy Father God, thank You for showing up for Judy through so many gifted lay folks called in this church to love her. I thank You, God, that in the midst of the darkest tragedy, You've given great hope. Thank You for Your redeeming and healing and restoring love. Thank You for Judy and her story, for Austin and Alex and we pray now,

God, that You would continue to walk with her and heal her and You would help her to find that place to discover what she was made to do for You. Thank You, God, for how You serve us and love us. In Your Name, I pray. Amen.

The nature of oral presentations makes them less precise than written materials; any lack of attribution is unintentional, and we wish to credit all those who have contributed to this sermon. Soli Deo Gloria.