

**Christ Presbyterian Church  
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Your Work | John 9:4**

We started the year wondering how it could be different than the year before and the year before and the year before. We said we could do New Year's resolutions, but it seemed to us that if I struggle in all those areas up there (shows slide), those seven areas, maybe I need something different than just "try what you're doing a little harder" or "make a resolution", and so together we have been looking at a different model. We remember how the apostle Paul wrote that God said, "Let light shine out of the darkness." Light is a sign of what could be. Let light shine out of the darkness and then Paul says, but He put this light, this treasure, inside us, inside jars of clay. Cracked pots. He put this treasure inside jars of clay to show that the power is from God and not from us, so if our life is going to be different this year, it's going to be because the light and life, the grace and power of God, is closer to us and may leak out, spill out on others.

If you don't hear anything else today . . . you are an eternal being living in a wondrous universe. When this planet breaks up, when the sun goes out, you will be an eternal being in a wondrous universe. It ought to affect the way you live tomorrow. It ought to affect how I view everything, because the universe is not only wondrous, it's broken. It's dark in many places. And as we have seen in our families, in our neighborhoods, in our countries, in our world, it's a universe at war and into that comes light. The revelation of God's Gospel brings the restoration of everything. Everything. All those things up on the screen, all seven of those things are touched by that, including the idea of work.

There is a tradition in the life of the church that says when the Gospel is being proclaimed the congregation shall stand. Would you stand for the reading of the Gospel? The apostle John, in the ninth chapter, tells a story.

<sup>1</sup> They were passing a blind man, and His disciples asked Jesus, <sup>2</sup> "Rabbi, why was this man born blind? Was it because of his own sins or his parents' sins?" <sup>3</sup> "It was not because of his sins or his parents' sins," Jesus answered. "This happened so the power of God could be seen in him. <sup>4</sup> We must work quickly to carry out the tasks assigned us by the one who sent us. For the night is coming, and then no one can work. <sup>5</sup> But while I am here in the world, I am the light of the world." [John 9:1-5]

The word of the Lord. [Congregation says: "Thanks be to God"].

And so clearly we must work quickly. We must work because the night is coming when no one can work. This is about Jesus' view of the work that we have to do. It sets up the second longest story in all the Gospels. The man born blind comes before Jesus, Jesus sends him to the pool where he washes off, and Jesus heals the man. The Pharisees

hate that and they call on the man and say, “What happened to you? This Jesus is a fraud.” He says, “I don’t know about that.” So they call on his parents and they say, “Is this your son?” The terrified parents said, “It looks like our kid, but he’s blind. This kid can see. How did that happen?” “I don’t know. You have to ask him.” The man comes back and he says, “I only know one thing. Once I was blind, now I see. Do you want to see Him, too?” Furious, the religious leaders kick the man out of the temple and send him wandering—seeing, but wandering. And then it says that he finds Jesus. No, it doesn’t say that! It says Jesus finds him. Jesus finds the man born blind and He shows him what God looks like. It’s a great story.

The part we’re going to talk about today is in verse 4.

<sup>4</sup> We must work quickly to carry out the tasks assigned us by the one who sent us. [The Father sent Jesus, Jesus sends us] For the night is coming, and then no one can work. [John 9:4]

So, we’re going to talk about work. You all think you know what work is...I’m not sure that you do. I think a theologian would define work a little differently than you do. Let me give you a little clip from a theologian. [Shows clip from *The Princess Bride*]

“I do not think that word means what you think it means.” I don’t think work means what you think it means. We had a question on our survey for the series about work and whatever work is, you do it a lot. Look at that (shows slide). Many of you work 50 hours or more, more than 32 of you—I’m sure you were lying—work 60 or more hours. We do this a lot whatever work is. The reason I want to redefine it is because I suggest that when you gather here, God should define what work is, not your boss. Work for God is different than your job. Work is different than your school. Work is different than your role in raising your children. Work is different than being with the grandkids, and it’s different than being with your parents as they prepare for the end of their lives. Your work is to use the light of eternity to watch and to see the world differently—to see where Jesus wants you to bless the world, to bring light. You are called to bring light into the world—that is your only job. You may get paid for other stuff, you may get recognized for other stuff, but your work is to do the will of the One who sent us, and it is to bring light to a dark world.

We’re going to hand out the next copy of *CPC Life* as you leave today. In it is a quote from Tim Keller, a Presbyterian pastor. He says, “A job is a vocation only if somebody else calls you to do it.” Vocation comes from the Latin word *vocare*, which means to call. So, a job is a vocation only if somebody asks you to do it for them rather than doing it for yourself. Our work can be a calling only if it’s reimagined as a mission of service. Work is a mission of service to something beyond our own interests. That may not be what you feel as you drive into the Best Buy lot on Monday mornings, but for those of us who gather here, we are called to do the work.

I have a good friend here, Steve. I’ve known Steve twenty plus years. He’s good at his job, he’s been promoted several times, he was lured away to another company where

he's making more, doing more, supervising more. He's a great guy and very skilled, but the thing is, Steve doesn't particularly like his job. It's his job. He doesn't live for it. It's not like he can't stand to get away, but he's happier when he's not at work than when he's at work. Steve is constantly doing the work of the One who sent him to bring light into dark places in the world. Steve was at a wedding recently and he sat with a couple of young adults and these young adults talked to me afterward and said, "We spent an hour with Steve and I have never felt as listened to in my whole life. I've never felt as honored and respected . . . I've never felt such hope coming from somebody. It was so good. I wish so much I could work for him." Jesus says, "You are the light of the world." That's what work looks like. You are God's work plan for this dark broken place and God doesn't seem to have a Plan B, so you better get to work. You have work that is urgent that needs to be done now because the night is coming and then no one can work.

That clash between light and darkness is all about the role of faith. C.S. Lewis talks about that doesn't he? He's got this great image. He says, "I believe in Christianity the same way that I believe the sun has risen. Not only because I see the sun, but because by it I see everything else differently." That's what we are to do. To see the sun and see everything else differently, and to help people live in the light.

There's a doctor here who I am positive is in that far right category of 60+ hours a week. Between rounds and patients and surgeries, between teaching and other responsibilities, he hardly has time to think, and yet that same doctor, every week, sees every person from Christ Presbyterian Church that comes into his hospital. He goes into their room—knows none of them—and if it's okay he sits on the side of the bed, asks about them, holds their hand and says, "Hey, can I pray with you?" Over and over people say *better than Rich, better than Jody, far better than John, this idea of some doctor coming in and praying with me changes it all. I go there because I'm prayed for.* This guy is good for nothing . . . I say that in the best possible way. He's doing it because the light is in him to be shared. In the last service there was a woman sitting right where Chris is—96 years old—she comes up to me the other day and she says, "You know, I've started to work in the store down in the basement of our residential area. It's a volunteer thing, but I come to work because John . . . they're so glum and I want to cheer them up a little and we sell more than any other shift all week." She's light and life. She's doing the work of the King.

You know, it's so interesting in this story that Jesus is involved in that everybody is blind. We think it's the story of the man born blind . . . they're all blind. The disciples don't have a clue—they're spiritually blind. The Pharisees are opposed to what God is doing. They are so blind they cannot see God at work. The parents are blinded by their fear, and only the man who never saw anything his whole life is able to look Jesus in the eyes and say, "What's next? What do I do next?" Jesus' call to work is especially important for those of you today who do not get a paycheck. Those of you who stay at home, who are retired, who are students, who are caregivers, because our society has bought into the lie that good work is paid work and the more you make the more you're worth. That's a lie from the pit of hell. So we need to redefine what work really is.

Have any of you ever heard of the evangelist Tony Campolo? Crazy bald man—just a great guy. He and his wife Peggy have been here a couple of times. Peggy has a Master's degree, but stayed home and raised the kids. Tony is a professor and in an academic setting people can get a little snobby. So Tony and Peggy are at a faculty tea and one of the department heads came up to Peggy and said, "What is it that you do, dear?" Peggy replied, "I am currently socializing two immature homo sapiens into the dominant values in the Judea-Christian tradition in order that they might become instruments for the transformation of the social order into the kind of eschatological Utopia that God willed from the beginning of creation. That's my job." And Peggy would ask, "And what do you do?"

Jesus calls us to watch, while it's light, for the work that King Jesus wants us to take on. Especially the unrewarded work, especially the unnoticed work. I have to tell you, I think that our watch is important. You have to keep watching because if you allow yourself to just get into the daily whirlwind, you don't watch and you just go through the motions. There's a book called *Watch* by Rick James. I love it. He says the church is not usually blind like our man. The church is usually just asleep to the work that God has for us. We think this is our work. This is not our work. Then he says this, "The Bible is filled with spiritual metaphors for every illness known to antiquity: blindness, deafness, lameness, and leprosy, but sleep and its relations—dull, drunk, drowsy—are by far the most common illnesses in the New Testament." Sleep is the most common illness in the New Testament and that term is usually aimed at us—at Jesus' followers, not the unbelieving world. We're asleep. I want too much to talk about this, but that's another sermon for another day. Let me just leave you with this: wake up. Our truest work given by God is seeing and doing the blessing of a broken world. Seeing and doing the blessing of a broken world. Bringing light to others instead of getting a check or getting recognition.

Now, most of you guys know the Jewish scriptures are the Torah—the law and the prophets—but much of the Old Testament is surrounded by commentary and that commentary, built up over centuries, is called the Mishnah. Rabbis teach their kids the Mishnah almost as much as they teach them the words of the law. Well, in the Mishnah there is a word for work, an important word for work, and it's called tikkun olam. The work of God, tikkun olam, is repairing the world. This is what Jesus meant. Do the work of the One who sent me. Repair the world. Bless the world. Tikkun olam. Repair it. Sometimes that looks like social justice, sometimes that looks like just doing a good job, sometimes it looks like loving others, but the rabbi said that at its core tikkun olam means gathering the sparks. The sparks have gone out into the darkness and the place is dark. To gather the sparks means to put them into jars of clay and have the light shine out so that people can see the love of God. The work of the people of God is to be the light of the world. Let's pray.

Lord Jesus, I thank You so much for these sisters and brothers who come with the hope that they will hear the most important thing in the world. That they will learn it and remember it and do it. I thank You that this notion of doing better this year is not to try the same thing harder, but instead putting Your love and Your

light inside us so that we are loved and healed and bless others, which becomes our work. Now Lord, as we come to Your table, it's sort of like a pit stop. It's a work break place and this snack that you give us, this work meal is designed to remind us who we are and whose we are and what your work for us is. Bless the bread, bless the juice, bless us as we eat, and draw us together. In the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Spirit. 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.*