

Faith. Vocation. Culture.
The Washington Institute

Vocation Is Mission:
REDEMPTION-Redeeming with Jesus
November 16, 2011
Autumn Series
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The following is transcribed from Part 3 of the Fall "Vocation Is Mission" lecture series delivered in the Historic Church of The Falls Church on Wednesday, November 16, 2011

VOCATION IS MISSION

Welcome! We are going to begin tonight the way we have begun the last two sessions. At The Washington Institute we are fond of saying that vocation is integral not incidental to the mission of God in the world. We believe that our work, rightly understood and practiced, is as important to God's work in the world as pastoring, as missionary work, as evangelism, as so called "full-time Christian ministry." I wish I had a dollar for every time I have had a conversation with somebody who is in the marketplace wondering if they have missed their calling to "full-time ministry." And we are saying that person's work, practiced rightly, understood rightly, is as important as any of those other so called professional Christian vocations. The question, though, is why we believe this. We had a pastors' lunch today in which we reflected on the fact that this stuff preaches really well. People get really excited, to which I say, "Great except that it does not matter if it isn't biblical."

So at The Washington Institute we are taking this fundamental assertion that vocation is mission and asking the very important question, "Does the bible teach it?" We want to make sure that there is a clear, scriptural foundation—indeed a biblical and theological justification—for this challenging and beautiful assertion, which we are exploring in this series. So we are looking at what the bible has to say about our work and the mission of God through the lens of Creation and Fall and Redemption and Consummation.

RECAPPING CREATION AND FALL

In our first session we looked at Creation. We saw the beauty of the way God made things and the way they were designed and why. What God made at Creation was beautiful—both nature and us—and it was with a purpose. Let's review God's purposes in Creation. God created the earth to reveal His character, to reveal His glory—to use a more theological term—and to create a place where His character could be revealed. Then God created people to reveal God's self, to steward His creation, and to be in relationship with Him. To put that another way, the purpose of Creation first and foremost—first and foremost—is the revelation of God through creation, through His direct relationship with people and through human beings. That is why there is anything. That is why there is an "is."

Now, the crown of God's creation, as we have considered, is mankind because we, unlike anything else, bear His image, which works itself out in that we have a spirit, we have certain capacities like reason or spirituality or conscience or self awareness, and then the jewel and the crown of our capacities as it relates to the image of God, we have freedom. We can choose. We have been given the dignity of having will. We image God through marriage and through childbearing. We even image God through celibacy—it is as strong as any other teaching on relationships in the bible. We image God through our relationships with one another, and—and this is where we are really focusing in this series—we image God in our divine function. That is, God works, so we work. Genesis 2:15, we have looked at this quite a bit. The LORD God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and to take care of it. The Great Commission of Jesus is preceded by the Garden Commission of God. Let me say that again, the Great Commission of Jesus is preceded by the Garden Commission of God.

This is a new term to me. I am very familiar with the Great Commandment. I am very familiar with the Great Commission, but this is a new one to me, the Garden Commission. I came across it in this little book, *Our Work Loves our Neighbor* by a couple of friends, one of whose name is John Gilman. Let me read this to you; it was news to me:

"The idea of God's Garden Commission may be new to you. It was the first commission given to human kind, and we just looked at that in Gen 2:15. The stated reason for our lives is to work lovingly in creation like God. Later in Genesis 2, God gives a second reason for our lives, for loving fellowship. It is good to be and to work in fellowship."

He goes on to quote Gilbert Bilezikian who says, "God who is a worker-creator and who has a servant heart, formed the human being in His image so that he would also enjoy working as God's servant." In other words, working is pre-Fall. Working is part of the design. One more paragraph:

"The garden commission was not abrogated by the Fall, was not superseded by God's covenant with Israel, by the new covenant established through Christ, or by the Great Commission given by Christ to make disciples of people everywhere. The Garden Commission stands as majestic as ever as God's expression of His love to human kind."

So, that is what we looked at in our first lecture, that part of our commission, part of our reason for being, part of the design for which we were made is to steward creation in the direction of the whole world—the whole created world becoming a place of revelation and enjoyment of the peace and the fullness and the love of God. In short, the earth was to become a place of *shalom*—God's *shalom*. Earth was to become a place for the flourishing of everything that God had made and man was given the mandate to make that happen through all of the resources that were given in fellowship with God himself. That is why things were made; that was the subject of the first lecture.

Then the second lecture: last time we looked at the Fall, that everything good gets twisted. It is bent, with profound effect. Everything in the design of Creation was derailed. How many of you feel like you have encountered just a little bit of the Fall today? Yes, me too, indeed. God could have abandoned us, couldn't he have? But He did not, and He will not. Thanks be to God! So there are two ways in which God did not abandon us. First, He created the Jews, and then second He sent Jesus, and finally we get to talk about Him tonight.

THE FULL-RAINBOW GOSPEL

Before we do though, I would like to tell you a little story—a parable really. It is a story of a small town not that far away, not that long ago, that was richly blessed. The people of the town could see a beautiful rainbow in the sky all the time. It never went away and it was indeed a beautiful rainbow. It was big and it was bold and it had bright colors and the people loved the colors of the rainbow, but they loved one especially: they loved the color yellow. They loved yellow. It was just so bright and so clear and so unexpected. They just loved yellow. So they sang songs about yellow. They praised yellow. They wrote poems about yellow. They gave lectures about yellow. And they wrote about all the different places where you could see yellow and how yellow was the most amazing of all the colors.

But there were other colors in the rainbow—several actually. There was Roy G. Biv, right? There was red, there was orange, there was indeed yellow, there was green, there was blue, there was indigo, and

there was violet. Some people began noticing these other colors and they wanted to learn more about them. They began pointing out the other colors more often or writing about them, sometimes advocating for them, sometimes writing songs about them, and the yellow people didn't like that so much because they thought that the people who loved red didn't actually like yellow. They thought that yellow was somehow being diminished; somehow the glory of yellow was being sacrificed. Or they thought that because other people wanted to sing about red, they actually didn't believe in yellow quite so much. But for all of the squabbling and all of the different songs that were being sung about all the different colors, it didn't actually matter so much. Do you know why? Because the big, bold, beautiful rainbow just sat there shining in all of its glory with all of its colors, each one of them necessary to reveal its splendor because without any of them it would not be a full rainbow.

So friends, for quite a long time, the evangelical tradition has been quite good at seeing yellow—and singing and writing and elucidating and expounding and defending and advocating and proclaiming. In this parable yellow represents the gospel of the atonement, that Jesus died for our sins on the cross, and that through Him we can be forgiven and saved from Hell and go to Heaven. This is the gospel of yellow, and friends, there is nothing wrong with the gospel of yellow. It is glorious, it is majestic, it is beautiful, indeed it is clear, and brilliant, and unexpected. Yellow is a great color and without the atonement, we would be screwed. We would be up a creek with no hope. The atonement matters. It is just that there are other colors in the rainbow. Our tradition has been good at articulating the gospel as it relates to Genesis 3; we have not done so well articulating the gospel as it relates to Genesis 1 and 2 or Revelation 21. Now of course, these are one gospel though.

I have provided in your notes some insights from Tim Keller. The title of his article, “The Gospel in All Its Forms: Like God, the Gospel is both one and more than that,” is actually helpful. In other words, yes, a rainbow is yellow, but it is also more than that. He writes, “There must be one gospel, yet there are clearly different forms in which that one gospel can be expressed.” And his effort to express it goes like this:

“If I had to put this outline in a single statement, I might do it like this: Through the person and work of Jesus Christ, God fully accomplishes salvation for us, rescuing us from judgment for sin into fellowship with him, and then restores the creation in which we can enjoy our new life together with him forever.”

This is Keller's attempt at explaining what the rainbow is. It is a lot longer; it is a lot more involved. It is backward looking, present looking and forward looking.

“One of these elements was at the heart of the older gospel messages, namely, salvation is by grace not works. It was the last element that was usually missing, namely that grace restores nature, as the Dutch theologian Herman Bavinck put it.”

In other words, grace restores Genesis 1 and 2. Grace restores the original designs for which we were created.

“When the third “eschatological” element is left out, Christians get the impression that nothing much about this world matters. Theoretically, grasping the full outline should make Christians interested in both evangelistic conversions as well as service to our neighbor and working for peace and justice in the world.”

In other words, if you have the whole rainbow in view, it is going to lead you to evangelistic concern, and it is going to lead you to loving and serving our neighbors. It is going to lead you to working for justice and peace. In another lecture Keller frames the gospel with three different words and three different symbols. He talks about the incarnation, he talks about the crucifixion, and he talks about the new creation using the symbols of the cradle, the cross, and the crown. He says that when he preaches, he usually will only touch on one form of the gospel because attempting to do them all in one sermon is just too much. So he will highlight one and then the next sermon he will highlight another one, and then another one, and he says that hopefully over the long haul people get a comprehensive vision of the whole rainbow. They can understand that the rainbow is not just yellow, that there is indeed more here. There is indeed great news of what we have been saved from, however the whole gospel—the better news—is what we have been saved for. And if we are not crystal clear on what we have been saved for, which relates to why we have been made, what we have been saved from will sound tiny, hollow, and intellectually unsatisfying.

Maybe you have observed this; maybe you have experienced it. The whole gospel is what we have been saved for and that is the extent of God's salvation in Jesus. The gospel is the extent of salvation, not just salvation as it applies to me individually. The good news, or “gospel” in Greek, touches everything that the Fall touches. Creation is touched by the good news. God’s direct relationship with human beings is touched by the good news. All of a sudden we are able to live into our design—and I am quoting 2 Peter 1 here—to participate in the divine nature, to become God-like. We can now do this because of the gospel, because of fellowship through Christ, through His suffering and death on the cross. Creation is touched by the gospel, direct relationships with God are touched by the gospel, and the image of God in human beings is absolutely touched by the gospel in all of its splendor. Our spirits can live with God eternally now. Our capacities of reason, spirituality, conscience, and self-awareness can begin the process of being restored. Our will, no longer bound by slavery to sin, can actually become free to choose the good. Marriage and childbearing are restored because of the gospel. Relationships with one another become possible in ways that are not fraught with division because of the gospel. Everlasting life incorporeal, incarnate—physical life forever with God becomes possible because of the gospel.

And since we are talking about work, our divine function is impacted by the gospel by the entire salvific work of Jesus. This is amazing! In his wonderful, encyclical *Laborem Exercens*, translated "On Human Work" John Paul II uses the phrase, "the gospel of work," three times. He calls it the *good news* of work. Now if I said that you would say, "Yeah Bill, you're just being flamboyant," but that was the Pope! Tim Keller offered his, "this is what the rainbow looks like," and it was longer than what we might be able to write down on a napkin, wasn't it? And N. T. Wright would say, "That's ok, such a thing deserves to be complex." God is complex; you are complex. Let's be careful to not be too simplistic and therefore lose the richness of what we are actually dealing with.

So in the interest of not being too simplistic, here is my take:

God created the earth and put man on it to walk with him, to be in loving community with each other, and to take care of all that God had made so that we would live into the fullness of the image of God and become partakers of his divine nature. We sinned, and we broke, and creation broke, and all was cursed with pain and suffering, decay and death. God sent his son Jesus to break the curse and set it right and put us back on course. Jesus did this through his sacrificial offering on the cross and the power of the resurrection, and then sent his spirit so that we could then become the agents and stewards of the New Creation that God started. When he comes back to finish the work he started, all those who have lived in

him and died in him will be raised to new life—in flesh, recognizable, perfect, and transformed, capable of relationship and in perfect communion with God and with each other. We'll be rewarded according to our deeds on earth with responsibility, joy, riches and honor, and we'll rule and reign with Jesus himself and the New Earth that has some sort of continuity with the world we now live in. And we'll enjoy and explore whatever adventures the creator of the universe concocts and that we co-create with him.

That is what I think the rainbow is. So all of this—all of this—is good news, this beautiful rainbow, Roy G Biv, all this because of Jesus. Jesus came to get creation back on track. To use N. T. Wright's phrase from *Simply Christian*, "setting things to rights," that is what Jesus was doing. Jesus does not come to pluck us off of the titanic; rather, he comes to fix the titanic and make it better and enable it to take its passengers to a better place than the North Atlantic.

So Jesus confronts the effects of the Fall in all their variety, and as we considered last time, the variety is multifaceted. Jesus redeems, and He invites us to redeem with Him, even through our work. Whatever you are coming from today is one of the ways that Jesus was either continuing to create in the world or continuing to redeem the world—that is what you were doing at work today. Let's see if we can understand that.

So we have looked at the Old Testament vision pre-Fall in Genesis 2. Post-Fall there is another vision of work, a vision of twisted labor in the Old Testament, and it is quite clear. Let me read this to you from Ecclesiastes 2:20-22:

"So I turned about and gave my heart up to despair over all my labors under the sun, because sometimes a person who has toiled with wisdom and knowledge and skill must leave everything to be enjoyed by someone who did not toil for it. This also is vanity and a great evil. What has a man from all the toil and striving of heart with which he toils under the sun?"

This is the post-Fall Old Testament view of work written by a tired man. Jesus fully addresses the futility that is expressed through the words of Solomon by redeeming the value of our work, and He does it in two ways.

JESUS DIGNIFIES WORK BY WORKING

First, Jesus worked. Jesus was a carpenter. We glean this from the same story told twice: First in Mark 6, which is probably the earliest version of this story, Jesus is being rejected by the Jews, He is being challenged in the temple, and He is teaching, and the Pharisees say to Him, "Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary and brother of James and Joses and Judas and Simon?" They say "Is not this the carpenter?" In Matthew 13:55, the same account, the same story, they ask, "Is not this the carpenter's son?"

Mark 6 has a lot to say, "Is not this the carpenter?" Jesus apparently was known for being something other than a regular teacher. He was known for the work that he did. So on the one hand, there is sort of a folksy vision of a carpenter. And there is something very romantic about imagining Jesus in His quiet, little woodshop hewing boards with morning sun drifting through and wood shavings. There is something quite romantic about that actually, but I think that image is actually not unlike the image of the baby Jesus in the manger. It is Jesus defanged....perhaps that is the wrong image. It's Jesus too tame. It's Jesus too tame because the word for carpenter in Greek does not necessarily mean only a

carpenter; it just means that working with wood is one of the things that this person—a *tekton*, to use the Greek—could do.

A *tekton* is a Greek word that means not merely a carpenter skilled at making cabinets or furniture, but a designer, a construction engineer, an architect. A *tekton* could build a house, construct a bridge, or design a temple. Ben Worthington says, "It [tekton] can refer to a worker in wood, or in stone. I agree that this likely means Jesus and his family used both sorts of materials to build houses, since stones were the normal main material used to construct a house in Galilee." Justin Martyr adds, "More accurately, *tekton* is an artificer, who could work in wood, fabric, masonry, sort of a general contractor or builder. Certainly carpentry would have been the most common undertaking."

In other words, Jesus was not just sawing boards. He was probably designing. He was probably constructing. He was probably building. He was probably creating some of the materials He was going to do that with. Jesus was creating. Justin Martyr, an early man in the Church who died about 165—I always love the early guys because somehow you just think that they knew the true story more than most—wrote that Jesus was a native of Palestine, and he identified Jesus as a carpenter and said that Jesus crafted yokes and plows. Sounds like what? "My yoke is easy." It adds some color to Matthew 11, doesn't it? Matt 11:28 says:

"Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light."

The venerable William Barclay has this to say:

"In Palestine, ox yokes were made of wood. The ox was brought and the measurements were taken. The yoke was then roughed out and the ox was brought back to have the yoke tried on. The yoke was carefully adjusted so that it would fit well and would not gall the neck of the patient beast. The yoke was tailor-made to fit the ox."

Alright, I digress. This verse in Matthew 11 is very confusing to us though, isn't it? We strive to understand it. How many of us really want to know what Jesus means when He says, "Following me is easy. My burden is light?" All of us do, don't we? Part of the reason why He says this is because He means to say, "My design for your discipleship is actually designed for you. It's tailor made for you. It's not somebody else's that you need to wear." In other words, we get so tired so often in trying to follow Jesus and we find it difficult to do so because we are following somebody else's spirituality. And we have not taken the time or effort to listen for the voice of God, to let Him tell us what His vision for our lives is, what His vision for our discipleship is according to the radical uniqueness with which we have been made. I don't want my wife to have a relationship with me like she has with everybody else. I don't want my God to have a relationship with me like He has with everyone else. Does that make sense? "My yoke is easy, because it's made for you, and I'm inviting you to discover what it is." Jesus, the yoke-maker. Wow! Such an understanding just adds new vibrancy to this passage, to any agricultural metaphor that Jesus used, to any sort of building parable that He told. Jesus knew what He was talking about because He was not just sawing logs in a woodshop. No, He knew how things work. So again, Gilman says, "Our work is really God at work and Jesus made an absolutely God-ordained contribution to the good people in Nazareth as a carpenter,"—as a *tekton*. In other words, the people

of Nazareth were blessed because Jesus worked, and He probably did good work. We don't know that for sure, but we can probably draw that inference.

Now, there is some nuance here that we need to explore; there is some nuance here that we need to be careful with. On the one hand, this aspect of Jesus being a carpenter is not something that has been given enough attention. The subtitle of Gilman's little book *Our Work Loves our Neighbor* is telling, which is, "Did Jesus Waste Most of His Life?" This is actually a prevalent posture in our tradition. We don't think at all about what it means that Jesus was a carpenter except for the beautiful little image of His sawing logs in a sunlit covered room. So it is really good to give it more attention, and it is needful, but we need to be careful because He could have been a rabbi with a trade. There is ample possibility that Jesus was in fact more of a teacher than a carpenter, but that carpentry is what He did on the side. We don't know, so we want to be careful.

But we do know that He was a carpenter, and we don't want to obscure this passage in Luke. Luke chapter 3:23 says Jesus was about 30 years of age when He began His ministry. We don't want to lose sight of this fact. This is where you are hearing me say, "You know what? The bible trumps what I want to believe." The bible does not always let me preach what will simply preach well. We have to be careful with the text; we want to make sure that we know these things are here. In other words, carpentry was not Jesus' main vocation. Carpentry was not what Jesus came to do, but the fact that Jesus worked is still critically important because He was a true human. If Jesus was going to enter into the human experience, He was going to enter into work because that is one of the reasons why we are made. In other words, doing work was not beneath God. Manual labor was not beneath Jesus. Jesus dignified work by doing it.

Now let's talk about John Paul II's encyclical that he gave two decades ago. This is from *Laborem Exercens* or "On Human Work":

"The ancient world introduced its own typical differentiation of people into classes according to the type of work done. Work which demanded from the worker the exercise of physical strength, the work of muscles and hands, was considered unworthy of free men, and was therefore given to slaves. By broadening certain aspects that already belonged to the Old Testament, Christianity brought about a fundamental change of ideas in this field, taking the whole content of the Gospel message as its point of departure,"

—Right there, did you hear that? Taking the whole rainbow. Taking the whole content of the gospel message as its point of departure—

"especially the fact that the one who, while being God, became like us in all things devoted most of the years of his life on earth to manual work at the carpenter's bench. This circumstance constitutes in itself the most eloquent "Gospel of work," showing that the basis for determining the value of human work is not primarily the kind of work being done but the fact that the one who is doing it is a person."

The Word of God's revelation is profoundly marked by the fundamental truth that man, created in the image of God, shares by his work in the activity of the Creator and that, within the limits of his own human capabilities, man in a sense continues to develop that activity, and perfects it as he advances further and further in the discovery of the resources and values contained in the whole of creation."

Do you follow? This is powerful. Let's continue on.

"The truth that by means of work man participates in the activity of God himself,"

—As creator. That alone...Wow!

"Was given particular prominence by Jesus Christ—the Jesus at whom many of his first listeners in Nazareth "were astonished, saying, 'Where did this man get all this? What is the wisdom given to him?...Is not this the carpenter?'" For Jesus not only proclaimed but first and foremost fulfilled by his deeds the "gospel," the word of eternal Wisdom, that had been entrusted to him."

In other words, Jesus brings the gospel first by working. Before He ever says a word, He is actually proclaiming the gospel.

"Therefore this was also "the gospel of work," because he who proclaimed it was himself a man of work, a craftsman like Joseph of Nazareth."

And John Paul II goes on. This is powerful, isn't it? Jesus, before he ever said a word in public as part of His ministry, was proclaiming the gospel simply by showing us what human beings were made to do. This is good news indeed! Jesus was a working man, and in the doing of the work, He was fulfilling the garden commission. That is what He was doing when He was being a carpenter. He was showing us what humans were created for, like in everything else He did. That is what Jesus *does*, He shows us what human beings *are* created for. Again, Gillman says, "We believe this [Garden Commission] was given in the New Testament and that Jesus' carpentry years demonstrate it. Part of the whole gospel of God's love for the world is meeting people's needs for good shoes and good food." Jesus dignifies work by choosing to spend most of His adult life doing it, and that is the first way that Jesus redeems work. Simply, He worked, and He shows us what work is for, and He proclaims the gospel thereby.

REDEMPTION RENEWS WORK'S DIGNITY

The second way that Jesus addresses work—and this is a little bit of a play on words here—is that Jesus works the larger work of confronting the Fall through Redemption. That is His work. He comes to confront the Fall. That is the major part of His work. And He does that by redeeming, and His redemption includes our work. Tom Nelson quotes Dorothy Sayers in his book. Dorothy Sayers says, "The first Adam was cursed with labor and suffering; the redemption of labor and suffering is the triumph of the second Adam—the Carpenter nailed to the cross." Hear that? The redemption of labor and suffering. Ben Worthington adds, and this is very important, "Work, then, from a Christian perspective, is not just viewed in light of the original creation order, much less in light of the Fall." Most of us primarily view work through the lens of the Fall. It is something we have to do. It is something that is burdensome to do. It is toilsome to do. And of course, that is what the promise was in the curse—it's going to make you sweat.

But this is not the best lens through which to view work. Rather, Worthington adds, "It is primarily viewed in the light of the Christ event, and it looks forward to the completion of that event when Christ returns." There you have it all: Creation, Fall, Redemption, Consummation—Ought, Is, Can, Will. Worthington is saying that if you want to understand what work is, you must look at it through the filter of the cross. And I agree. Jesus on the cross gets the world back on track in a million ways. That which

is fallen is being restored and is becoming a verifying sign that the Kingdom of God has come. That is what the miracles are in the gospels: Jesus proclaiming in sign what He was proclaiming with word, that the Kingdom of God is at hand, here it is, and I am He, I am the Messiah, I am bringing it. That is what a verifying sign of the Kingdom of God is; it is when something that is fallen is confronted and restored and redeemed and actually set back on track according to its original design. That is Redemption.

REDEMPTION IN WORK: CRACKHOUSES & GALLSTONES

I experienced this profoundly several years ago when we purchased a house in Washington D.C., and I offer this as a little picture of redemption at large. I suppose at that time it was part of my work. Over the past thirty years, this large house in Northeast had been used as a boarding house. It was neglected, then it was abused, then it was host to a lot of sex and a lot of drugs and quite a bit of violence, and there was a fair amount of crime that went in and out of that house. Three weeks after we moved in I was awakened for the first of three times by the marshals, as in, "Are you Joe Schmo? Good morning, it's 6:30," and I want to say, "Uh, new owner, new owner." So a lot had gone on in that house. And of the three abandoned cars that remained in the back yard when we bought it, I know at least one of them had been stolen. It is hard to know what was more memorable in those first days of seeing the house. I don't know if it was the smells, the rotting food, the wet basement, or the urine, or the dirty clothes, or the trash. It might have been the fights. It might have been the roaches. It might have been the weed. It might have been the black water standing in the bathtub. It might have been the cars. It might have been the three dumpsters of junk we had to haul out. It might have been the crack pipes, the needles, the condemns. It might have been the bullets—I don't know what it was, but all of it was memorable.

Over the course of six months though, 216 S Street was transformed, transformed clearly by the power of God and through the labor of so many of His people like Steve Garber and his wife Meg and their family. Literally hundreds of hands from around the country came over a period of time and helped us make that place which had been so long a symbol of blight and brokenness, so long a verifying sign of the Fall, into a place of peace and beauty, a place of welcome and worship. Instead of cars in the backyard, we put in organic gardens for growing. We put in places to sit and flowers. Instead of using a room for sex and drugs, we used that living room for the first nine months of a church plant. That room had its walls painted with prayers and with the words consecrated in the Eucharist. Instead of a dark room that used to sleep two people, now there is a room that is flooded with light where we were able to host up to 18 people for dinner. And instead of a room upstairs that was a prison for an elderly woman with the door kept locked all the time, we turned it into a guest room where people could come for retreats in the inner city as a place to find God in the inner city. The porch was completely filled with junk and clothes, and we ripped it all out and we had bible studies on the front porch. Now 216 S Street was a verifying sign of the Kingdom of God—that's what redemption is. Redemption is a symbol of God's power and His work in the world. "Behold," He says, "I am making all things new," and He is still doing it.

So that was redemption at large. Now let me focus in a little bit on vocation and work and how certain aspects of work join in Jesus' work of confronting the effects of the Fall and bringing healing. Recently my dear, beloved wife Tara has had some stomach issues for a little while, and we weren't sure what was wrong. They became bad enough that we wanted to get them checked out. So last Thursday morning I took her into the hospital, and she was quickly diagnosed not only with gall bladder issues but also one of her tubes was obstructed by a gall stone. She was in a lot of pain, and it was bad to let it

linger like that, so she ended up having to have two surgeries, one on Friday and one on Saturday of last week.

I was mindful the whole time—the whole time—that the emergency room doctor, Dr. Landis, and the two doctors that performed the surgery were absolutely God's hands engaging a fallen world in which my wife's gall bladder was full of stones and in which she was being threatened. These guys were indeed doing Jesus' healing work through their work. So, I am really grateful for emergency room doctors; I am really grateful for surgeons because they are confronting the effects of the Fall. That's mostly what they are doing. The irony is that they don't even know whether or not they are doing it. In other words, God is big enough that He doesn't need to claim credit for what He does. All the better when the emergency room doctor is a Christian though.

So Sunday morning I was preaching at The Falls Church and our worship leader that morning who was playing the piano is actually an emergency room doctor. We were talking before the service, and, frankly, I was a little bit emotional because I didn't have anybody who I could thank the way that I wanted to thank, but here was this emergency room doctor, and I said, "Justin, I just have to thank you for your work. Thank you for what you do. I need to tell you that your type really helped my family this week. Thank you." Then I sent him the link to the article on our website that I wrote a little while back called, "Thy Kingdom Come' through Hands of the Healers" in which I wrote about how it is that people involved in medicine are God's hands and feet of the world, and the way Jesus continues to confront the effects of the Fall, so their work matters. Your doctor's work matters—and so does ours. We are redeeming with Jesus. We, in our work, are confronting the wide effects of the Fall and we are pushing them back, and we are saying the Kingdom of God has come through Christ, the crucified Christ, the risen Christ. How else does Jesus get His work done in the world? What other agency is there?

WORK AS CREATION OR REDEMPTION

As Christians, to fully appreciate the dignity of our work, we must—and I want to underscore "must," here—we must understand our work through one or two filters, or both. The question is whether my work is creating with God or redeeming with Jesus? First, Creation: am I creating with God? Here are some creating jobs: architects, artists, writers, mothers and fathers, builders, construction workers, farmers, law makers, nutritionists, story tellers, teachers. All of these jobs, or vocations, can be understood through the lens of creating with God. Secondly, Redemption: am I redeeming with Jesus? Here are some jobs that fall more into the category of redeeming with Jesus: lawyers (That is what lawyers do—they deal with the Fall all day long. They deal with division and defeat and the inability to do community. That is all they do. Law makers are the creators. Lawyers are the ones who deal with it when things do not work out or when the laws themselves are bad.), doctors and medical folks, insurance providers, relief and aid workers, judges, and the list goes on and on and on and on. All these folks' primary vocation is to participate with Jesus and bring redemption to the fallen world through their work.

Now of course, there is a lot of both creation and redemption in all of these vocations. Some jobs are both creative and redemptive. Sometimes it depends on the day. Sometimes whether or not you are creating with God or redeeming with Jesus can literally depend on the minute—it changes. So dear friends, *you* are how God is creating; *you* are how Jesus is redeeming. I have given you a wonderful insight from Teresa Avila which usually is applied to works of mercy; it could equally be applied to work:

*Christ has no body but yours,
No hands, no feet on earth but yours,
Yours are the eyes with which he looks
Compassion on this world,
Yours are the feet with which he walks to do good,
Yours are the hands, with which he blesses all the world.*

—Yours are the hands, by which he *works* in the world.

*Yours are the hands, yours are the feet,
Yours are the eyes, you are his body.
Christ has no body...
...on earth but yours*

That is remarkable! Dignity. Do you hear the shouts of dignity all over the human race about the value of our work? We should hear those shouts. However, for all that, for all that we are as the body of Jesus, for all that we get to participate in by continuing the ministry of the Messiah, it will crush us if we forget that we are not Jesus and that we are not the Messiah.

And this is from Oscar Romero; this is for us visionaries, this is for us world changers, this is for us who came to Washington because we wanted to make the world a better place:

“It helps, now and then, to step back and take a long view. The Kingdom is not only beyond our efforts, it is beyond our vision.

“We accomplish in our lifetime only a tiny fraction of the magnificent enterprise that is God’s work. Nothing we do is complete, which is another way of saying that the kingdom always lies beyond us.

“No statement says all that could be said. No prayer ever fully expresses our faith. No confession brings perfection. No pastoral visit brings wholeness. No program accomplishes the church’s mission—

—And here we can add, no amount of surgeries is going to fix everybody. No building is going to be the perfect building. No building is going to last forever. Whatever it is that you do—

“No set of goals and objectives includes everything.

“This is what we are about: we plant seeds that one day will grow. We water seeds already planted, knowing that they hold future promise. We lay foundations that will need further development. We provide yeast that produces effects beyond our capabilities.

“We cannot do everything and there is a sense of liberation in realizing that. This enables us to do something, and to do it very well. It may be incomplete, but it is a beginning, a step along the way, an opportunity for God’s grace to enter and do the rest.

“We may never see the results, but that is the difference between a master builder and the worker. We are workers, not master builders; ministers, not messiahs. We are prophets of a future not our own.”

HOW WE REDEEM WITH JESUS

That is pointing right at our next lecture, isn't it? So friends, let me just draw this to a close with a couple applications. First, connect your vocation or your work to either creating or redeeming. Figure out what you are doing, and it will change how you do your work. Or walk into your office with that mindset of "I get to do one or both things today. What's the form going to be?"

Second, do good work. I am sure Jesus' yokes were good. I am sure the things He built were really good. Dorothy Sayers says that the way you worship God at work is to make good tables if you are a table maker. She says, "The church's approach to an intelligent carpenter is usually confined to moral instruction and church attendance. What the church should be telling him is this: that the very first demand that his religion makes upon him is that he should make good tables." There it is. Of Dorothy Sayers, Tom Nelson adds in his book *Work Matters*:

"[She] is not saying that offering moral instruction and inspiring worship services are unimportant...but what we must not miss in her insightful words is the importance of the church in teaching each one of us that our work—whatever it is—is to be an act of worship. Dorothy Sayers continues with remarkable insight when she says, "Let the church remember this: that every maker and worker is called to serve God in his profession or trade—not outside of it...The only Christian work is good work well done."

And a point I have made before and I am sure I will make again: if I don't do my work with everything I've got and as well as I can, and you do your work with everything you've got and as well as you can, then your work matters more to God in your "secular" workplace than mine does in professional Christian ministry. I want to do my work well too. Garrison Keillor signs off every show with, "Be well, do good work, stay in touch." So that is the second thing, to do good work.

Third, remember that Jesus Christ, the crucified and risen one, gives your work meaning, and we get to figure out how, and that is for each of us to do given what it is that we are doing.

One important thing to know and remember from the life of Jesus and His work—and I am pushing this, and I am going to read it from Ben Worthington—fourth, vocations can change. In some ways we know this, but for many of us this actually creates a lot of anxiety. I got a degree in X; shouldn't I be doing that? Well yes, unless God calls you to something else. Worthington says this really well because he doesn't only say this to people who are working secular jobs. He says, "In the course of a lifetime, God may equip us and call us to various jobs or tasks. We should not assume that the initial call—could be a carpenter or a minister or a doctor—is necessarily intended to be our lifelong vocation." I like that. He levels all vocations and says, "Don't wed yourself too much to them because God can change them." Be sensitive. Jesus' move from his primary vocation as a carpenter to his fuller vocation, the deeper vocation, His ministry, being the messiah demonstrates this. We can have dramatically different seasons in our lives and in our work in response to the call of God.

Finally—and this is a word, again, specifically for us in Washington—and that is that we want to be those sorts of people who welcome the carpenter as much as we welcome the congressman. The currency of D.C. is how much influence you have and how much influence you can trade in—who you know and who you have access to, who knows you and so on—and we tend to gravitate toward people who are somehow important according to our own criteria. This is very, very dangerous because what Jesus the carpenter shows us is that there is no one who is more important than the other, that there is no work

that is more important than the other. What matters is that you are called to it. So we want to be really careful to welcome the carpenter, to welcome the folks in our town who have jobs that do not necessarily fit in well with the dominant culture of our town. We want to be sure to say, “No, no, no, they matter to me as much as anybody who is making votes on capital hill, or whatever else they do.”