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Faith@Work - 'Part 2 - Looking for opportunities'

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(Gen 1, 2, 3 - last time; Ex 20:9-10, Prov 12:11, 14:23, 23:29, Eph 4:28, Eccl 5:18-19, James 5:4, Luke 20:25, Mic 6:8, Acts 18:3, 2 Thes 3:7-10,) - refer to texts as we go.

Prayer

2 Introduction

In my 'Faith@Work - Part 1' sermon (14-10-18) I began by asking: Do you see your daily work as being part of God's work (if retired, did you see this)? Many Christians answer 'not really' - and that's a problem. The world of 'work' has often been ignored by the world of 'church'. During a difficult time in my previous engineering working life, I really struggled with fellow Christians lack of appreciation and support for working people. Out of that pain, began my journey to discover a Christian theology of work, also known as 'Faith@Work'.

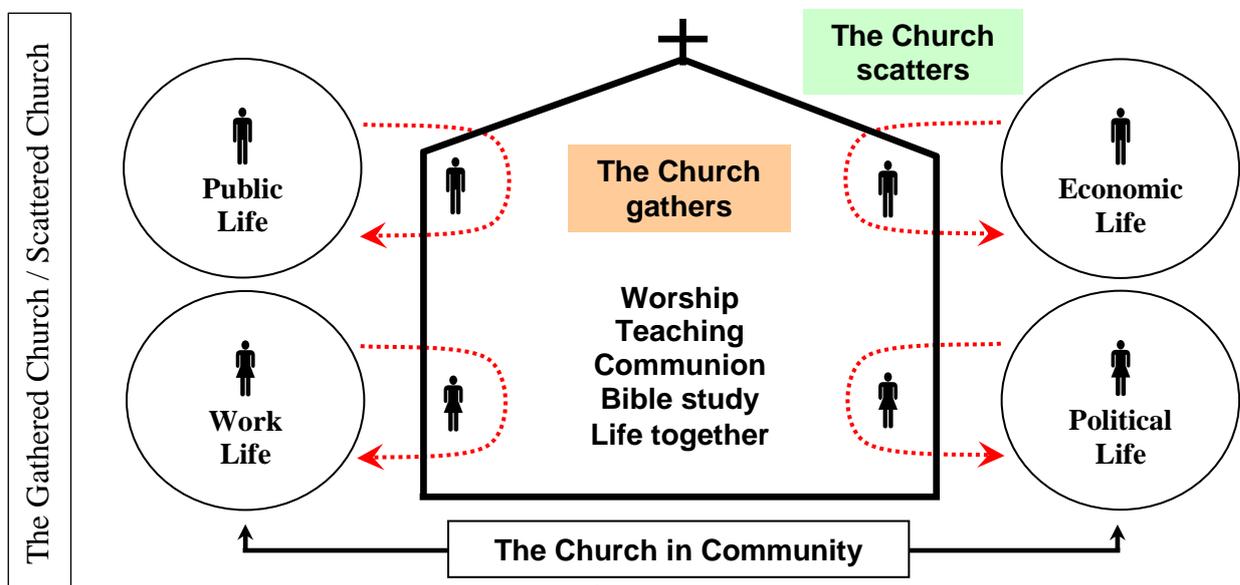
Part 1 - Laying a foundation (recap)

In Part 1, I sought to lay a foundation for a (a ≠ the) Christian view of work. Questions / topics included: Why are people leaving Church (~ relevance of church to the working life)? What is your view of work (~ Sunday / Monday gap)? Is there a Biblical view of work? Does human work have value to God? Does it add value to God's work? What about the fall from paradise (~ impact of living in a fallen world)? Why the missing link between church and work?

3 Combining some Biblical ideas (mainly Gen 1, 2, 3 and other verses) we arrived at the following:

- **Our work is co-working with God in his world.** It's one way we show the image of God in us. We continue God's work - using and nurturing creation. Our work has great value to God.
- **Work is an important part of being human.** It enables a sense of meaning and purpose found through creativity and responsibility. Lack of meaningful work = powerlessness. *More later...*
- **Work has been distorted by sin, but Christ is redeeming it through us.** When Christ makes us a new creation, He wants to make the work place part of that new creation, part of his Kingdom.
- **The 'gathered' church (Sunday) prepares us to be the 'scattered' church (Monday to Saturday).**

4 We 'gather' on Sunday for worship, teaching, communion, Bible study and shared life. We're equipped and challenged - including values, morals, ethics, righteousness (right living) and justice (making things right) - for when we 'scatter' into the world for the other six days. God through the church influences all areas of life (public, working, economic and political). In this way, we can feel appreciated, supported, valued and equipped for our daily working life.



Part 2 - Looking for opportunities (new)

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Having recapped 'Part 1 - Laying a foundation' for a Christian view of work, we'll now look at some more practical aspects of work. I've called this 'Part 2 - Looking for opportunities'. In addition to co-working with God, work enables a number of opportunities, but we often have to look for them and choose to take advantage of them. This can be very challenging...

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#1. Meaning, purpose and responsibility

How do we find meaning and purpose in life? (We touched on this in Part 1.) I've become increasingly aware that for us humans, finding meaning and purpose in life involves taking *responsibility for something*. Work (of whatever type) offers opportunity to be *responsible for something* (eg: completing tasks, arranging events, creating policy, implementing process, making decisions, teaching and training, serving people, ensuring justice, caring for creation) leading to a sense of meaning and purpose in life. I think that God has made us this way, indicated (loosely) by a number of verses pointing to the expected normality of work...

- The ten commandments: 'Six days you shall work, the seventh day rest' (Ex 20:9-10).
- Proverbs for wisdom - selecting a few: 'Those who work their land will have abundant food, but those who chase fantasies have no sense' (Prov 12:11). 'All hard work brings a profit, but mere talk leads only to poverty' (Prov 14:23). 'Do you see those who are skilled in their work? They will serve before kings; they will not serve before officials of low rank' (Prov 23:29).
- Paul's instruction for Christian living: 'Stop stealing and work so that you can share with those in need' (Eph 4:28). This could be paid work or growing vegetables.

Whether by 'attraction' to co-work with God, or 'instruction' to experience *responsibility for something*, our work helps provide meaning and purpose.

7

#2. Vocation and sense of calling

I started with the question: Do you see your daily work as being part of God's work? Some of us feel our jobs offer a vocational sense of calling more than others. The nature of our work does impact how we feel. Some observations:

- (i) Often people in inter-personal relational work such as teachers, doctors, nurses and counsellors feel their work is their ministry. This is excellent.
- (ii) But people in non-inter-personal work such as engineers, accountants and truck drivers, may feel their work is not really serving God. This is not so great. For example, there are very few engineers serving on the overseas mission field as engineers, where-as doctors and nurses (and teachers) often do their actual work. However, I believe the provision of clean water and better waste control by engineers as part of a mission's community health programme can be a 'kingdom of God' activity and contribute to witness in a similar way to medical care.
- (iii) Sometimes homemakers / child carers can feel they are not being used by God - stuck at home.

The examples above indicate we may view some work as more meaningful than others. There are perceptions that being 'people' orientated is somehow better than being 'task' orientated or working in 'spiritual' work is somehow better than 'secular' work or 'home' based work. This is really unhelpful to individual self-esteem and the overall cause of God's kingdom. We have work to do!

A helpful verse to put the working life into perspective... 'I have noticed one thing, at least, that is good. It is good for people to eat, drink, and enjoy their work under the sun during the short life God has given them, and to accept their lot in life... To enjoy your work and accept your lot in life - this is indeed a gift from God (Eccl 5:18-19). Everybody wants to be valued and have contentment.

8

#3. Witness and mission

Every Monday morning church members go off to the secular work place. Does the church need any more outreach strategy than this? If we support and nurture Christian workers and they stay with the church, we will have local workers in full time Christian witness. *‘The future of the church will not be decided by what a few people called missionaries and ministers do on behalf of the rest of the church, but by the whole membership of the church living out the Gospel in the world every day’* (Alistair Mackenzie, NZ Baptist Pastor, www.faithatwork.org.nz). A question - When was the last time we took advantage of this opportunity and verbally witnessed at work?

9 #4. Ethics and justice

Work gives opportunities to show our Christianity, by making ethical and just decisions. James tells us ‘the exploited workers and their unpaid wages are crying out to the Lord God against us’ (James 5:4). Watch out if you exploit people! Luke tells us to ‘give to Caesar what is Caesar’s and to God what is God’s’ (Luke 20:25). There comes a time in our work to stand up, be counted and say and do what is right. What would Jesus do in our work situation? We’re called to ‘act justly, love mercy and walk humbly with God’ (Mic 6:8). A question - Does our work contribute to justice, mercy and God's values, for example creating good employment and communities, or does our work lead to more unemployment, exploited workers and marginalised communities?

Some questions - Is the job you and I do appropriate for a Christian? Would Jesus support our work or the business / shares we invest in? Would our area of work be considered an ethical investment, enhancing the wellbeing of the workers, their families and the environment? How would our work score in triple bottom line reporting assessing ‘social, economic and environmental’ outcomes, rather than just financial return on investment? This is called ‘impact investing’ - people, profit and planet. We were shocked about 3 years ago, to find out that the ANZ was investing KiwiSaver funds in nuclear weapon manufacturers. Ethical investments try to avoid investing in weapons, tobacco, alcohol (I think), exploitive / slave labour and environmental chaos. When I first started engineering, I made a decision not be involved in projects involving ‘bars’ (for alcohol). This may or may not be my decision now, but it was true to my values then.

10 #5. Tent Making

Paul worked part time in his ‘tent making’ trade, self-financing his church-planting ministry (Acts 18:3). He challenged the locals... ‘Follow our example. We were not idle when we were with you, nor did we eat anyone’s food without paying. We worked night and day, labouring and toiling so that we would not be a burden to any of you. We gave this rule: If you don’t work, you don’t eat’ (2 Thes 3:7-10).

A question - Is God calling some of you to part-time work, freeing up your lives for church and mission related work. As a church we have so many community ministry opportunities, if people would free up some time. The ‘part-time secular work / part-time church work’ model is one way to go. This is increasingly used in overseas missions as Western support for mission decreases. However, Paul's tent making model, which tends to emphasise that his secular job was purely to raise support for his ‘real ministry’, risks negating my key message - that our work has value to God. Tent making employment should contribute in a practical way to the community / country in which it takes place, not just be a cover for mission. Sadly, I’ve seen some overseas mission folk with business or NGO visas, just pretending to do what the visa says, while doing other work.

11 #6. Finance

Well paid work enables us to financial support God’s mission, both in NZ and overseas. However, one problem in NZ is not a lack of people to be involved in global mission, but rather a lack of people prepared to finance them. Most church overseas mission budgets work out less than \$2 per member per week. Our own NZBMS overseas mission work goes through periodic financial crisis, resulting in staff and projects struggling. Will we use our work to help finance global mission?

An aside... What about the future of work?

Since writing the 1st version of this sermon in 2001 (18 years ago!), 3 changes have occurred (and are still occurring) in terms of the world of work, which offer both an opportunity and threat going forward. These are: (i) Social business model, (ii) Kingdom business model, and (iii) The future of work it self (mass unemployment). These are best addressed in a 'Part 3' sermon later.

Conclusion

12 I started by asking: Do you see your daily work as being part of God's work? My dream is to see you (Cavy Baptist people) 'gathered' on Sundays, and then 'scattered' from Monday to Saturday, seeing your work as co-working with God, and feeling appreciated, supported, valued and equipped in your daily work. I'd love to see you looking for and taking advantage of opportunities provided by work. We've looked at (i) Meaning, purpose and responsibility, (ii) Vocation and sense of calling, (iii) Witness and mission, (iv) Ethics and justice, (v) Tent making, and (vi) Finance. As a church, let's embrace these Faith@Work ideas, as we support each other and the wider community to have meaningful and purposeful working lives under God.

Last time I finished by praying for Bruce James who was beginning as Deputy Principal at St Clair school the next morning. How's it going Bruce? Today I want to finish by praying a Celtic Christian blessing on all our workers. I'll do this after our final song.

Song

Celtic Christian blessing for workers - refer to PP

13 *All: God, seven times a day I work on this hungry farm, and each time I say to You:*

Lord why am I here? What is there here to stir my gifts to growth? What great thing can I do for others - I who am captive to this weary toil?

14 *Reader: And seven times a day God answers me:*

I cannot do without you. Once my Son lived your life, and by His faithfulness He showed my mind, my kindness and my truth to humanity. But now He is at My side, and you must take His place.



Have a meaningful and purposeful week doing your work under God.