

September 6, 2015

*Al Bundy's Favorite Holiday*

Ecclesiastes 5:18-20

**Opening Words:** The history of Labor Day can be traced back to 1882. Matthew Maguire, a machinist, suggested the holiday while he was serving as the secretary of the Central Labor Union of New York. It must have been a good idea. Oregon made it a state holiday in 1887. Thanks to the efforts of Grover Cleveland, it became a national holiday in 1894. In our time, Labor Day marks the end of the summer or the beginning of autumn. You know it is true.

Labor Day is a strange and unique holiday, it is like none of the others. Just think about it for a moment. We don't decorate our homes on Labor Day. We don't give gifts on Labor Day. The floral and card industry have not found a way to sell us their products on Labor Day. Traditionally, especially in Canfield, Ohio, no one wants to go to church, like Christmas and Easter, on Labor Day. If the truth be told, we don't even like Labor Day because it means the end of summer and the beginning of something much colder. Yet, in spite of all this, we observe Labor Day annually and this year will be no exception.

This morning, on this Sunday of Labor Day weekend, we are instructed today from the Old Testament, the book of Ecclesiastes. It is one of the five books found in the wisdom literature section of the Old Testament. It stands beside Job, Psalms, Proverbs, and the Song of Songs. It is difficult to put a date on Ecclesiastes, but tradition tells us it was written by King Solomon. He wrote it for a single reason, to remind us that human wisdom is limited. It is God's wisdom that offers true insight. Life that is not centered on God is meaningless. Only God can satisfy our restless souls. With this understanding, let us hear this morning's scripture lesson, Ecclesiastes 5:18-20. I have called this message *Al Bundy's Favorite Holiday*.

**Ecclesiastes 5:18-20** <sup>18</sup>This is what I have observed to be good: that it is appropriate for a person to eat, to drink and to find satisfaction in their toilsome labor under the sun during the few days of life God has given them—for this is their lot. <sup>19</sup>Moreover, when God gives someone wealth and possessions, and the ability to enjoy them, to accept their lot and be happy in their toil—this is a gift of God <sup>20</sup>They seldom reflect on the days of their life, because God keeps them occupied with gladness of heart.

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American writer and publisher Elbert Hubbard (1856-1915) once said, *"The best preparation for good work tomorrow is to do good work today."* If you understand that quote, say, **"Amen!"**

I know, I am showing my age with this question. Do you remember the television show *Married... with Children*? It ran for eleven seasons on Fox Television Network. The show ended in 1997. It gave us an extremely cynical view of the American family. I tend to be a little cynical myself, so I consider *Married...with Children* a true television classic. The whole show revolved around the Bundy family. The head of the household was Al Bundy, played by Youngstown's own Ed O'Neill. Al was married to Peg Bundy, play by Katey Sagal. They had two children, Kelly

Bundy and Bud Bundy, Christina Applegate and David Faustino. In my opinion, Al stole the show. He represented every man who felt let down by life. A product of this area, he was a recovering high school football star, whose life went astray. Everything that could go wrong, did go wrong for Al. However, one of the few things he did like was Labor Day, it was his favorite holiday. He said, it was the only holiday created for people like him, the working man. Do you remember Al Bundy's job? He was a shoe salesman at the local mall. There is nothing wrong with being a shoes salesman, but Al Bundy hated his job. That leads me to an interesting question. Does anyone here hate their job? Does anyone here just go to work to get a paycheck? I hope not. This is a good question for Labor Day weekend.

What was your first job? I got my first real job when I was fourteen years old. According to the law, you had to be sixteen to work. So, a friend and I ran a classified ad in the world's best newspaper, *The Warren Tribune*. We wanted to mow people's lawns. We used our fathers' lawn mowers and his father's ancient Chevy Suburban to get to each home. We built a small business, but we made a little money. When I was sixteen, I got a job at the Eastwood Mall, as a custodian. I emptied countless waste baskets and cleaned countless toilets. When I went to college, my mother said my job was to go to school. During the summer months, I painted classrooms at the Trumbull Campus of Kent State University in Champion. When I got out of college, I worked at a bank. I consider that my wilderness experience; it was a horrible job. Then, I sold advertising space for a local newspaper. When I went to seminary, I was the youth director at the First Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in Frankfort, Indiana. When I transferred to Asbury Seminary, I was the pastor of the Pleasant Grove Christian Church (Disciples of Christ). To earn extra money I worked on a tobacco farm, pulling, cutting and stripping plants. I cleaned banks at night for a while and helped deliver another local newspaper. After I graduated from seminary, I served three churches in the old St. Clairsville District. Next, I served a church in the old Wooster District for a single year. I served in the old Cleveland District for five years. You started paying me in 1994. I need to say this because it is true. This is the best job I have ever had. I believe, this is the best job I will ever have. I love my job! Did you know the average American worker will change their job 8 times before they reach the age of 40? Being the pastor of this church helps me appreciate this morning's scripture lesson. Let's look at the text together.

We are in the fifth chapter of Ecclesiastes. The topic is work. You do not need an advanced degree to understand this passage. The words are straightforward. To the human eye, work is a curse. It is true. People think you are strange if you like your job. That was one of the reasons we related to Al Bundy. He hated his job; he hated being a shoe salesman. Through Al Bundy's eyes, work was a curse. However, through the eyes of God, work is a blessing. If you don't believe me, then try to live without a job; try to live without any income. Listen to what I am about to say. Your job is not just about getting paid. Your job is much more. Your true job is anything you do for the betterment of society. That is why God expects you to work hard every day, because God wants our world to improve. Your true job is your identity, and your true job is your most powerful witness. Your true job is your purpose for living; your true job is a gift from God. Al Bundy, shoe salesman, saw his job as a curse. God wants you to see your job as a blessing. God wants you to work hard every day. How hard do you work at your job? In 1989, a

book came out called Managing the Equity Factor. It reported that 85% of American workers say they could work harder. Are you part of that 85%? Do the people in your life consider you a hard worker? If that question makes you think, say, **“Amen!”** God wants you to see your job as a blessing!

An American television network filmed an interview with Mother Teresa of Calcutta, India. You know her story. Her job was to feed starving people and minister to the dying. The person conducting the interview asked Mother Teresa about her work. He wanted to know her feelings about being used by God in such a powerful way. Her work was known around the world. Even the President of the USA knew of her and her labor of love. She answered, "My work is God's work. I think, God wants to show His greatness by using my nothingness." She added, "I have no special skills. I am nothing more than a little pencil in the hand of God. He does the thinking, He does the writing. I, the pencil, have nothing to do with the work. I just make myself available to God." It is not just true of Mother Theresa, it is true of you. We are nothing more than pencils in the hand of God. The best we can do is make ourselves available to him. You will never know whose life you are going to improve.

History tells us the U.S.S. Astoria was the first U.S. cruiser ship to engage the Japanese during the Battle of Savo Island in World War II. It was a nighttime action fought August 8th and 9th in 1942. Although the Astoria scored two hits on the Imperial flagship Chokai, she was badly damaged and sank shortly after noon on August 9th. About 2:00 that morning, a young Midwesterner, Signalman 3rd Class Elgin Staples, was swept overboard by the blast when the Astoria's number one eight-inch gun turret exploded. Wounded in both legs by shrapnel and in semi-shock, Staples was kept afloat by a narrow life belt that he managed to activate with a simple trigger mechanism. At around 6:00 that same morning, Signalman 3rd Class Elgin Staples was rescued by a passing destroyer and returned to the Astoria, whose captain was attempting to save the cruiser by beaching her. The effort failed, and Staples, still wearing the same life belt, found himself back in the water. Close to 12 noon, Navy seaman Staples was picked up again, this time by the U.S.S. President Jackson. He was one of 500 survivors of the battle who were evacuated to Noumea. Safely on board the ship, for the first time, Staples closely examined the life belt that had served him so well. It had been manufactured by Firestone Tire and Rubber Company of Akron, Ohio, and it bore a registration number. Given home leave, Navy seaman Staples told his story and asked his mother, who worked for Firestone, about the purpose of the number on the belt. She replied that the company insisted on personal responsibility for the war effort, and that the number was unique and assigned to only one inspector. Staples remembered everything about the lifebelt, and quoted the number. It was his mother's personal code and affixed to every item she was responsible for approving. Do you suppose Mrs. Staples was glad that she had performed well on the job? She must have been glad she gave her best on that day. Do you always do your best at work?

American writer and publisher Elbert Hubbard once said, *“The best preparation for good work tomorrow is to do good work today.”* And all of God's people said, **“Amen!”**