

Driven or Called?

The Rev. Dr. Peter
G. James

Colossians 3:22-4:1

Sermons Series:
Best Spiritual
Practices

This satire rings true for those who toil under fluorescent lights, working on projects that fail to inspire among employees with questionable social skills.

I'm not an avid TV watcher. I make it a point not to watch sitcoms. But I've become hooked on *The Office*. It happened a few years back when our son, Andrew, and daughter-in-law, Becky, invited us over for dessert to watch *The Office*. Now, every night before bed, Chris and I watch reruns of *The Office*.

This sitcom that debuted back in 2005, is now rated the 5th best TV show over the past decade. The story line is altogether believable. The Dunder Mifflin paper company in Scranton, PA tries to make it in an increasingly competitive market dominated by big chain stores. Company headquarters in New York pressures this sagging branch office to boost sales and cut costs.

The regional manager of the Scranton office, Michael Scott, may be the world's most clueless boss. He always seems to come up with an inappropriate comment for every situation. Michael is known for his lame team-building exercises and goofy one-liners. "That's what she said" is one of his favorites.

Michael's right-hand man, Dwight Schrute, is an oddball

in his own right. This mild sociopath dreams of being boss and ordering people around. The rest of the cast is equally colorful. There's Stanley, the deadpan sales rep, who has Michael all figured out; socially awkward Andy, who fancies himself as a ladies' man; uptight Angela, who runs the office Party Planning Committee with an iron fist; and Kevin, who loves juvenile humor and M&M candy. I could go on, but you get the picture. Each episode is replete with silly feuds and office romances.

How ironic that the two most "normal" people on the show, Jim and Pam, don't like their jobs. This satire rings true for those who toil under fluorescent lights, working on projects that fail to inspire, among employees with questionable social skills.

Today's sermon focuses on the subject of work and vocation. This section of Paul's letter to the Colossians is called the "household code." Paul singles out three categories of people for special consideration. He first addresses wives and husbands in verses 18-19, the topic of last Sunday's ser-

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mon. He then speaks to children and parents in verses 20-21; a subject we will take up on Father's Day next Sunday. In the last portion of this household code, beginning at verse 22, Paul speaks to master-slave relationships.

If you are reading along with our summer Daily Devotional, you've already discovered each week's readings pertain to next Sunday's sermon. We read from Genesis 1 that we are created in God's likeness to exercise "dominion over the earth" (1:26). Genesis 2 commissions us "to till the earth and care for it" (2:15). To share in meaningful toil is part of God's creation mandate. Work is not damned by the fall. Work comes before "the fall," before there is anything wrong with us and with our world.

Work is punctuated with rest in Genesis, what the Bible calls Sabbath. God works six days and rests on the Sabbath day.

Supreme Court nominee Elena Kagan has been much in the news lately in her run-up for Congress voting on her nomination. The words one Harvard professor used to describe her became last Thursday's headline: "Her work is her life is her work." Apparently, Judge Kagan has not only made law her career but also her life. Do you live to work or do you work to live?

Work is part of our vocation in this world. Vocation origi-

nates from the Latin word *vocare* meaning calling. Vocation entails more than work. Vocation incorporates our calling to be disciples in every arena of life. It encompasses our role as students, parents, employees and retired people.

We typically use the word "calling" to describe church professionals who work full-time in the church. But Scripture never suggests clergy to be the only ones called. No job is more sacred than another. The first person filled with the Spirit in the Bible is not a priest but a craftsman named Bezalel (Exodus 36:31). Artists are as indispensable to building a temple as priests.

Mending broken bodies, caring for children, making clothes, tilling fields, practicing law and advancing science is work God wants done in His world. The disciples, after all, are people with day jobs. They are fishermen, tax collectors, doctors and farmers.

Have you ever thought of your vocation as a calling? Do you consider yourself called or driven? Some of us are driven to make lots of money and get ahead in this world.

Paul addresses the subject of work in the context of master-slave relationships. You might wonder why Paul doesn't rail against the institution of slavery in his letters. Let me warn you not to read our 21st century biases into the text. Paul treats

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slaves as full-fledged members of the Colossian church, not as second-class citizens. He writes in Galatians that the categories of slave and free are obliterated by the law of Christ. You might expect Paul to remind slaves of their duty to obey their masters, yet no household code, Biblical or otherwise, mentions a master's duty to treat his slaves "justly and fairly" (4:1).

The key to the passage is what Paul writes in verse 23: "Whatever your task, put yourselves into it, as done for the Lord and not for your masters." Paul reminds his readers in verse 24 that "...you serve the Lord Christ." The Lordship of Christ is mentioned nine times in a span of seven verses. Just as slaves are subject to their earthly lords so slaves and masters are subservient to their heavenly Lord. Masters and slaves alike answer to a higher authority. They work for the same Lord and Master—Christ.

We work for the Lord, not for any earthly master. We don't work for government or private industry. We work for the Lord. In truth, we do our best work for the Lord.

Former Minor League baseball player Marion Wade started a small cleaning business in Chicago back in 1929. He was determined to clean, not so that customers would be happy, but so God would be happy. He made it his goal to honor God in his cleaning

business. Today, the company he started, ServiceMaster, has become one of the largest cleaning companies in the world.

Mike Yaconelli writes about Elaine, a woman in his church who works as a manicurist. Elaine describes her work this way. "What I do for the living is listen to women talk. I cry with women. I laugh with women. I share in their pain. And I talk, too. After all, my customers can't go anywhere. Their hands are stuck in front of me for two hours. If I have a customer who doesn't like to talk, I suggest that she go elsewhere, because I don't just do nails."

"Elaine is a minister," Mike writes. "She has a ministry with acrylic and polish. She is a friend, confidant, listener, counselor, advice-giver and evangelist. Elaine is a minister of manicures." Now there's a calling for you—a minister of manicures.

Mike describes another friend, who runs a camp for teenagers. When asked to describe his job, Mike's friend says, "I'm a memory maker. I make memories for kids. In a world where good memories are sometimes hard to find, I create memories for children that will live with them for the rest of their lives." Mike writes, "My friend not only has a job, he has a calling."

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Work has unfortunately become all about the money. Our culture measures pride's worth in terms of money. Alexis de Tocqueville once wrote, "If people were to content themselves with material objects it is probable they would lose by degrees the art of producing them; and they would enjoy them in the end, like brutes, without discernment and without improvement."

Let's suppose you are in the business of making widgets for people. Your goal is not only to make money; your aim is to make good widgets. Making inferior widgets belittles our Christian calling. Carpenters should make good tables. Teachers should prepare good lesson plans. Soldiers must defend their country well. Our call as Christians is to create something of value.

We spend an hour or two here Sunday morning in worship. Yet, we spend 40+ hours at home, in school or on the job. So, it only stands to reason our greatest potential for serving God is not here but out there in the world. We congregate for worship Sunday so we can go out Monday and be the church in the world. Maybe we've invested too much time in preparing people to do ministry in the church and too little time preparing people for ministry in the world.

Redeemer Presbyterian Church in New York City takes seriously its mission to prepare Christians for ministry in the marketplace. They operate a Faith and Work Center. They cluster Christians into vocation groups to explore what it means to be

Christians in the way they do their jobs.

Pray and ponder over the next few weeks where God is calling you. Some of us are so driven that we have never imagined ourselves to be people called by God. Ask God for a renewed sense of call. Frederick Buechner speaks about God's call as the intersection of what you most want to do and what the world most needs to have done.

Maybe you may have a bad attitude about someone you work with. Most everything we do becomes a matter of interpersonal relationships. Maybe your work is negatively affected by someone you can't stand. You find yourself entertaining nasty thoughts toward this person. I challenge you for the next month to pray every day for this person. Imagine this person as someone for whom Christ died. This person may not change, but I'll bet you will.

You may be working in a deadend job right now. Eventually, you might need to change jobs. But in the meantime, what can you do to change your attitude? Let's imagine from this point forward that we work for God and not for any human supervisor. We tend to compartmentalize our lives, to see Sunday morning as God's time and Monday morning as company time. It's one thing to have a Sunday faith. It's quite another to take it to work with us Monday morning.

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