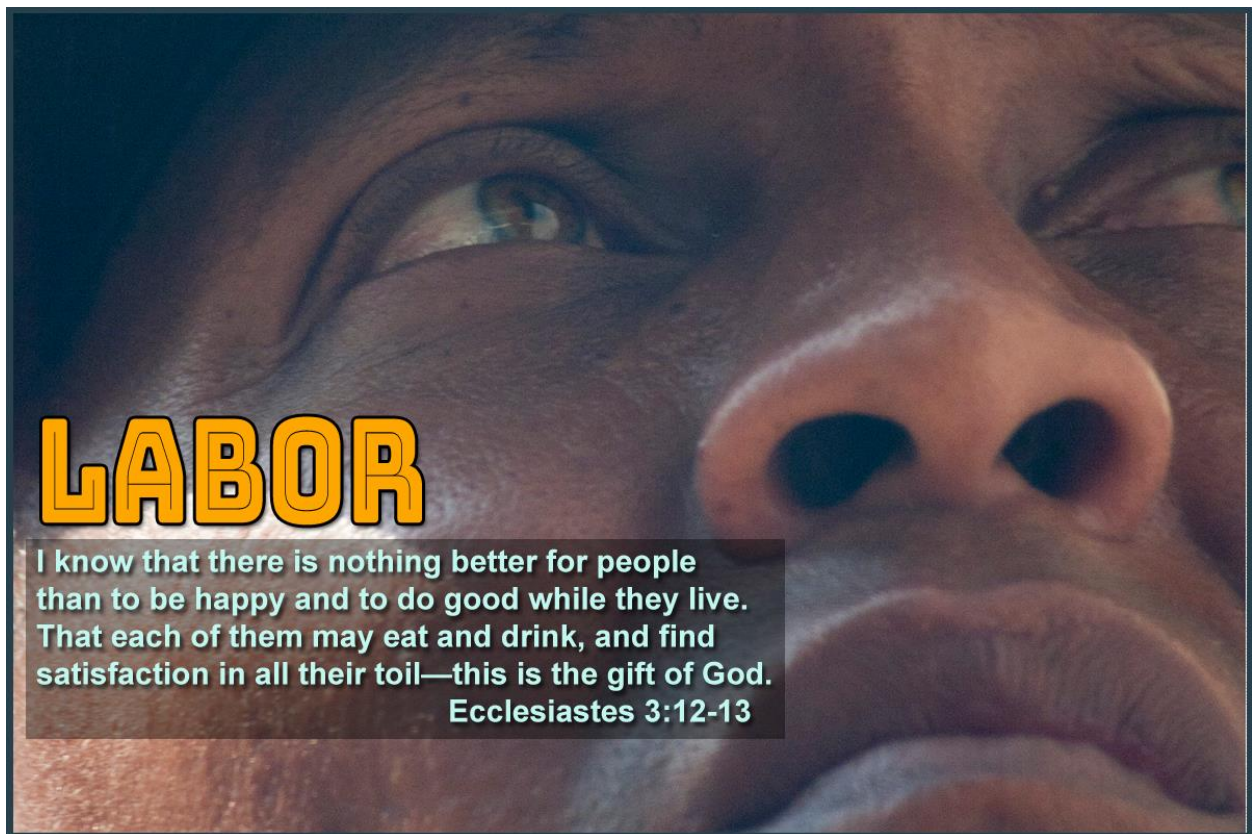


September 5, 2021

(Labor Day pause in series)

LABOR



Sixteen Tons

Geoff Castellucci

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fzIT80jQ3lo>

Ecclesiastes 3:12-13

I know that there is nothing better for people than to be happy and to do good while they live. That each of them may eat and drink, and find satisfaction in all their toil—this is the gift of God.

Joan sat in the shade of the porch, gently rocking to the singing of the wind chime. The cool evening breeze caught the sail, causing the clapper to strike against the metal tubes creating harmony both outside and inside nature. How pleasant to sit and ponder the day, sweet tea in a glass on the table near her rocker.

It had been a busy day. She had worked in the flower garden, removing weeds and thistles, after which she drew some water for the plants. There was running city water to the house, but she liked pumping the handle on the well for yard use. As long as she was at the well, she drew some water for her critters; 3 cats, a dog, and a duck. She had mended the garden fence where the rabbits had been getting in and then refilled the hummingbird feeders.

After lunch, she had gone to the meadow and picked a basket of wild plums (they were so juicy and sweet this season). Then on to the vegetable garden for carrots, tomatoes, potatoes, and asparagus. She pulled a few weeds and then filled in a gopher hole. Then she carried the plums and vegetables into the house, where she washed them up and put them in the refrigerator for later. She made a dewberry cobbler from the berries she had picked on. They were growing wild on the south barb wire fence. The cobbler was cooling in the pie safe even as she sat here enjoying the evening breeze.

Work. She had always worked. Her days had always been filled with labor ever since she was a child. She had spent some time in her 20's working as an accountant at the local feed store, but it didn't take long for her to realize that she preferred being in the outdoors and working with her hands. So, she had found a job working as a lineman (she hated that word. She was a linewoman.) with the electric company. Thirty

years working in the sun, rain, snow, heat, cold, and whatever else mother nature could throw at her. She loved every minute of it.

When she retired from the electric company, she carried letters for the Post office. She tried her hand working as a dog washer which led to a very short stint helping at the nearby animal clinic.

She had never married. Never felt the need to get married. There had never been a desire to take care of a husband or kids. All she needed to make her life complete was to look forward to another day's work. Her brothers had kids, and she celebrated having nieces and nephews in her life. And if she grew tired of them, she could just send them home.

She looked hard at her hands, wrinkled and scarred, from years of labor and toil. She could not imagine herself without work to do. It was who she was. Every scar on her hands and arms told a story. Some good. Some bad. She had a long scratch on her forearm from cutting back a rose bush this morning. But that happens when you are dealing with rose bushes. They tend to fight back. Rubbing the tip of her right pinky, she remembered getting is caught on a metal support while swapping out a transformer. The doctor had to cut off the end of that finger because it was so mangled. Then there was that scar on her right index finger where the dog had bitten her when she was carrying mail. The burn mark on her left arm where she had leaned on the man-lift motor while trying to help bring service back online after the hurricane reminded her of what it was like to be thirty feet in the air during high winds. So many stories.

The sun had set, and the stars were out. She did this every night. She did this to celebrate a day well spent, enjoying the fruits of her labor. Summer, Winter, Spring, or Fall, you would find Joan rocking on her porch, drinking sweet tea, contemplating the day's achievements. Sometimes a neighbor might join her, but most evenings, she had the stars to herself. She liked it that way.

Draining the last of the tea from her glass, she threw the leftover ice into the garden. "Waste not, want not," she always said. Then she stepped into her yard. Joan made a mental note that the porch needed painting. She paused and took a deep breath and looked up into that endless night sky and said the same thing that she said every night. "Thank you, Lord, for a day of accomplishment. And thank you, Lord, that I will have more work to do tomorrow."

With that, she stepped back onto the porch, turned off the light, and headed toward the kitchen for some warm cobbler.

John Kennedy believed in labor. He believed in hard work. He believed that we have a responsibility to teach young people the benefits of hard work and service. In an impromptu speech at the University of Michigan in October of 1960, he addressed 10,000 students. He asked them this question, "How many of you would be willing to serve your country and the cause of peace by living and working in the developing world?" The response was overwhelming. And the idea of the Peace Corps was born. Since that time, over 240,000 Americans have served in the Peace Corps.

Over the years, I have heard numerous people say, "Would it be such a bad thing to require two years of public service in some capacity from every young person over the age of 18?" It is an idea that has never had any legs. For whatever reason, most young people in the US feel little or no need to serve their country in any capacity, and parents generally do nothing to encourage it. While many other countries make such service mandatory, the US does not and probably never will. And while the draft may no longer be compulsory, I am reasonably sure that if it were necessary, congress would not hesitate to reinstate it.

I would like to see kids spend at least a couple of years working on a farm or working in a developing country. It is a great way to teach responsibility. It is a great way to get inside of a culture other than your own. It is a great way to understand that there is a world outside of video games, cell phone chats, air conditioning, and the mall.

Hard work built this country. Hard work to protects this country. It takes hard work to feed this country. There is a great deal of hard work that goes into keeping this country running.

I would love to tell you that I worked harder than my dad, but I didn't. I watched my parents work hard for every penny they earned. But I like to think that I got my work ethic from my parents, who taught me what it was like to put in a full day of labor. I learned about sore muscles and how great I slept after spending the day doing things that I never thought I would be able to do, sweat pouring from every pore of my body.

In the third chapter of Genesis, we read about what happened Adam and Eve ate from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil. God said to them:

16 To the woman he said,

“I will make your pains in childbearing very severe;

with painful labor you will give birth to children.

Your desire will be for your husband,

and he will rule over you.”

17 To Adam he said, “Because you listened to your wife and ate fruit from the tree about which I commanded you, ‘You must not eat from it,’

“Cursed is the ground because of you;

through painful toil you will eat food from it

all the days of your life.

18 It will produce thorns and thistles for you,

and you will eat the plants of the field.

19 By the sweat of your brow

you will eat your food
until you return to the ground,
since from it you were taken;
for dust you are
and to dust you will return.”

Giving birth is hard work. Hard work that you will never be able to appreciate fully, gentlemen.

Growing crops and tending animals hard work.

Taking care of your family is hard work.

As humans, we are capable of thriving through hard work. We don't often consider the work that goes into making our daily lives possible. When we buy gas, we seldom think about that worker in the oil field who hasn't been able to scrub all the grime off his body in years. When we buy food, we seldom think about the months that it took to grow, nurture, and process that food so that it was available to feed ourselves and our families. When we are privileged to go online and search for something we need or want, we seldom think about that person who went without sleep for five days, writing and correcting code, so that we could have that convenience.

It's like the adage about the ice burg. Only 1/10 of the ice burg is visible. The other 9/10 is the work required to make that 1/10 visible and accessible.

It took a mountain of hard work to leave Afghanistan, politics aside. It was only possible by the willingness, sacrifices, and hard work of brave men and women dedicated to saving as many lives as possible.

Today, as we listen to this message, people are being saved from the floods caused by Ida. There are firemen that have gone for days without sleep trying to contain the fires ravaging our forests and threatening communities and people. There are doctors and nurses pulling double and triple shifts in an effort to stem the advancement of COVID-19 and bring relief to those suffering in the hospital. Volunteers are working tirelessly to try and remove the rubble and care for the injured in Haiti.

Work is what we do. It isn't a pastime. It is an active pursuit to enrich the lives of the people around us. It is a purpose that God has embedded in us. It is who we are. And when we forget, we fall victim to laziness and ingratitude.

I know that there is nothing better for people than to be happy and to do good while they live. That each of them may eat and drink, and find satisfaction in all their toil—this is the gift of God.

It is hard for us to think of labor as a gift from God. Too many of us view labor just like 16 tons of coal, chains from which we cannot break free. That we have no choice and the more we work the farther behind we get. We rattle the cage bars and complain without realizing that the door is open and we can find

something better if we just set our mind to it. We should know realize that when we discover the purpose that God has for our lives, and we engage in that purpose, we find joy. Mark Twain said, “find a job you enjoy doing, and you will never have to work a day in your life.” Still, to do that we have to let go of the things holding us back. We have to be willing to leave unfulfilling work behind so that we can fulfill the purpose of God. We must be willing to step off the hamster wheel that promises to much and delivers so little, so that we can step into the real promise of Christian living.

Synchronizing our work with God’s purpose gives us that joy, People who do not find that purpose are often miserable at their jobs. But when we realize that we are doing just what God wants us to do, we discover labor, God’s sanctioned labor, is a blessing that cannot be diminished. We look forward to getting up in the morning and go to work.

Tomorrow is Labor Day, a day that Americans have set aside to celebrate labor. I find it to be a contradiction that we take the day off to celebrate our labors. But we do deserve to celebrate our ability to work. So, enjoy the day.

I also want us to take time and remember that not all of us get the day off on this Labor Day holiday. Right now, there are quite a few people that will be working extremely hard through the celebration in order to keep the lights on. Let’s remember to pray for those individuals that continue to serve while we are off celebrating. Let us lift our military, police, emergency responders, doctors, nurses, as well as all those workers operating cash registers, stocking shelves,

and providing support services so that we can enjoy a day of leisure with our friends and family. Let us raise them up in prayer and thanksgiving.

Let us be grateful for our jobs and the way that God continues to provide for us through God's mercy and grace. And while jobs may be plentiful in this area, jobs elsewhere can be very difficult to come by. We need to lift this nation of laborers to the Almighty and never take our work for granted.

God bless you all,

AMEN

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