

Did Jesus Just Command Us to be Workaholics?  
Delivered 08/06-07/2022 (Proper 14 / Pentecost + 9) at Grace Episcopal Church, Traverse City  
At a Eucharist and Sending Liturgy for a Seminarian

There are two main lessons that I got from today's Gospel teaching. The first is that Jesus has commanded us to be workaholics. We are to be at our post whether it's midday or midnight, we are to always have our lamps burning, and we are never to sleep, never to rest, never to take a sick day, or have a day off! Hey! Don't look at me like that! It's not my rule! It's in the Bible! You heard it yourselves!

And the second lesson I got from today's teaching is that sometimes logical-sounding, seemingly relevant, Biblical interpretations can be just plain wrong! Sometimes we project what we want to hear, or what we think we want to hear, into the text. Sometimes our culture clouds our ability to hear the message because the culture shouts more loudly. Sometimes we get the message right but the timing is wrong and so it really isn't the right message for that moment. Sometimes it's even the right message at the right time but we fail to speak it as truth in love and rather abuse it as a manipulation for personal power or control. The reality is that all engagement with Scripture involves interpretation – the very Scriptures themselves are interpretations! – and so we must humbly admit that sometimes we are going to get it wrong. How then, do we minimize that risk? What can we do to try to find interpretations that are the right message, for the right moment, and that can be delivered in love?

What I really hear Jesus saying in today's Lesson is that we must prepare our hearts. We must be prepared to see what it looks like when God shows up. This preparation involves praying daily and engaging with the Scriptures each and every day. It means wrestling with the hard passages, finding many different translations, investigating those translations and asking questions about their biases and how they came to be, it involves reading commentaries from across the millennia and from a wide variety of voices that don't sound like our own. It means devoting some time each day to the hard work of being steeped prayerfully in the Sacred Texts. It is through this daily study that we begin to see the patterns of how God has acted in the World. The more we sit with these Holy Words, the more clearly we begin to see how God is still acting in our World right now. This is how we begin to see what justice really looks like, what love really acts like, what Resurrection really means for the World. And this is something that each of us can do in our own way, according to our abilities, and it is something as important to our lives as is breathing the air!

But we are also called to use our unique, God-given gifts, to serve our community. Some are called to serve as janitors, some as physicians, some as teachers, some as musicians, the list of gifts is endless and so is the list of ways to use those gifts in service. Some, though, are called to continue their own personal prayer and study into their working life and become professionals at that work. We call many such people clergy; and, we Ordain them to that work so that it is clear that they aren't neglecting some other vocation but are doing not only what God has called them to do but what the church has collectively authorized them to do. This in no way puts clergy above anyone else; clergy certainly aren't inherently more holy, more good, or even more helpful to the community than anyone else. In a perfect World, we would all continually discern our life's vocations and be recognized in the Church; but, for now, we only do this with clergy.

Today, we are recognizing that a member of this community, Matt Roney, has felt a call to Ordained ministry and that this call has been confirmed by many in this community and in our Diocese. Today, we are sending him out to move to Sewanee, Tennessee for three years of residential seminary and we are sending him with our blessing, our prayers, our hope, and our love. But Matt does not go alone! His wife, Nora, is forever a part of their journey together and so we send her also with our blessing, our prayers, our hope, and our love. To be honest, Matt may be the only one of the two registered for classes; but, if I know anything from my time on that Holy Mountain, you both will be

changed, you will be deepened, you will emerge strengthened to do the holy work of daily prayer and study in a new way.

Later on in this liturgy, we are all going to make promises to support each other on this journey. We, as a community, are going to promise to hold them up in prayer, to financially support them whenever and however we are able, and to keep a place for them here so that they can return throughout this next phase of their journey and have a church home even as they prepare to take our love to other communities. And we must be a model for them, we must do our work of daily prayer and Bible study as a reminder to them to keep at it even when it feels overwhelming; and they must do the same and be a model for us for renewing our own dedication to this work even when the rest of our lives try to drown out God's still, small, voice. In this way we will always be one in the Body of Christ.

And on that note, one last thing about what Jesus had to say today: only we who are post-Enlightenment, thoroughly modern, capitalist, thinkers could imagine that Jesus was talking to any of us individually in today's teaching. Only we could think that He meant for us to cover the whole schedule, all 24/7/365, by ourselves! Jesus was speaking to a crowd, a gathered community, centered around Him! And to such a community as this He said to be prepared; to cover the midnight watch; to keep the lamp lit. Some of us are called to use our gifts to cover the night watch from time to time, some are more suited to God's work in the daytime. Each of us must contribute as we are able and as we are called; but, none of us are called to work without rest or to take every shift. Certainly not if the one calling us to this work had a habit of wondering off into the desert for days on end just to pray! No! God is the Lord of the Sabbath, the Lord of rest, just as God is also the Lord of our work. And so, when it is our turn to watch and pray, let us light our lamps; let us be one Body, the Body of Christ; let us, as a community, be ready to announce the coming of the Lord at the first sight of God drawing near; and may we rejoice whenever we see the Lord coming anew; and may our rallying cry forever be Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia!

~The Rev. Dr. Derek J. Quinn, Deacon