

This weekend we celebrate Labor Day, a holiday that was first held in New York City as a protest against unfair workplace practices. “The average American worked 12-hour days and seven-day weeks in order to eke out a basic living. Despite restrictions in some states, children as young as 5 or 6 toiled in mills, factories and mines across the country.”<sup>1</sup> On September 5, 1882 “10,000 workers took unpaid time off to march from City Hall to Union Square,” and soon other states began hosting the day, eventually becoming a national holiday celebrated on the first Monday of September to honor American workers. What began as a day of protest has evolved as a day to give thanks for the jobs, and I suggest, a time to also offer prayer for those seeking jobs.

Someone once asked me, “Have you ever had a job other than being a pastor?”

“Yes,” I replied. “In high school I worked in a factory sweeping floors, cleaning bathrooms, doing yard work, and a variety of other tasks that needed to be done. I also estimated costs and materials for lightning protection systems. Before I went to seminary, I taught preschool children with Head Start.

I’ve also served as an educational consultant and editor of curriculum, a hospital chaplain, as well as a religion professor in a university.”

“That’s good,” came the reply from a church member. “At least you have something to fall back on.” Although I appreciated the concern, I began to wonder if my days were numbered in that congregation.

Some jobs are more enjoyable than others, and each year an organization lists the top 200 or so jobs, ranking them in order based on factors such as work environment, stress level, income, and outlook and growth opportunities.<sup>2</sup> The top-rated job for 2019 is data scientist, followed by a statistician, university professor, and occupational therapist. Where do you think my job as clergy ranks? At #132, tied with carpet installer, broadcast technician, and archeologist.

Although it may be true that I have other job skills, I cannot imagine doing any job other than what I’m now doing. It’s been almost 30 years since I was ordained, and although I have had good days and bad days, overall, I have loved my job as a pastor.

In most jobs we might encounter one of those days when the boss asks us to do something and we want to reply, “Not my job!” Maybe it’s cleaning up the mess that someone else made. Or counting the numerous widgets for inventory. Or making a presentation even though you don’t like speaking in front of people. From time to time we face those tasks we would rather avoid, such as

one young man who applied for a job at a supermarket. The manager said, “Yes, I’ll give you a job. Sweep out the store.”

The young man may have thought to himself, *that’s not my kind of job*, and so he replied, “But I’m a college graduate.”

The manager quickly replied, “Oh, that’s ok. I’ll show you how.”<sup>3</sup>

As we’ve read through the book of Hebrews over five weeks, there have been times I’ve thought to myself, *I’m glad that’s not my job* as I read about the high priest’s role. He would have to enter into the inner most part of the sanctuary once a year and offer a blood sacrifice for his own sins and the sins of the people. This theme of offering animals as a sacrifice repeats over and over again in the

book of Hebrews, and even though the ancient practice seems far removed from our modern ears, the author keeps bringing up the topic. Each time I’ve said, “Not my job,” for I’m not sure I could sacrifice an animal.

The anonymous author brings the topic up again, but now he makes the larger point about Christ being the high priest who offers the sacrifice using his own blood. When I think of the pain and suffering that Jesus experienced, I sometimes wonder if he ever thought, “Come on, God, it’s not my job to save these people. Look at all the trouble they have caused through the years. They fight with one another, they argue with you, they follow you for a while, and then they wander away. I understand why you want me to bring a message of love, but why must I go through the suffering in order to convey the message?” What if Jesus had said, “Not my job?”

Come to think of it, what if Peter or the other disciples of Jesus had said “not my job” when Jesus asked them to leave their families and careers to

follow him for a couple of years, wandering from town to town?

When the angel appeared to Mary and said she would birth a child and call him Emmanuel, what if she replied, “Not my job”?

When God moved in the hearts of the prophets and invited them to bring challenging words to the corrupt political structures, what if they replied, “Not my job”? Actually, Jeremiah used a variation of that response when he said, “I’m too young, for I’m just a boy and I don’t know how to speak very well.” Isaiah echoed the reply when he exclaimed, “I’m a man of unclean lips.” Moses argued that he didn’t know God’s name and he couldn’t speak very well. Imagine if all these people that God called had stressed the point “It’s not my job” and walked away? It’s very likely that you and I would not be sitting here in church worshiping God, for they are the ones who kept the message of God’s hope alive. Without them, life might look very different.

Apparently, the photo on our bulletin depicts someone using the excuse “not my job.” Someone

painting the line on the side of the road in some unnamed city decided it wasn’t his job to move the debris off the road, so the painter went around a branch.

How often have you said that phrase to yourself, It’s not my job? When I come to church during the week and see trash outside the door, I often think to myself, “It’s not my job to clean up that mess,” but then I think how the wind will continue to blow it around, so I pick it up and throw it away.

When I see a group of people sitting at our picnic table under the shelter, I often find myself muttering, “It’s not my job to talk with them, for they don’t attend our church.” But then I think, *maybe I’m the only kind words they will hear today*, so I welcome them to our sheltered area and offer a blessing for their day.

Many times, we may feel like saying, “It’s not my job.” The words remind me of a story

about the animals in the jungle who got together one day and decided to play a football game. They chose sides, and one team learned pretty quickly that they had...a big problem. The

rhinoceros was on the other team, and they simply could not tackle him. They tried, but they just bounced off. Every time the rhinoceros got the ball he ran right down the middle of the field, and they couldn't stop him. In the first quarter the rhinoceros scored a touchdown. Then, in the second quarter he scored again, and then again in the third quarter. They tried to keep the ball away from him, but every time the rhinoceros touched the ball, he ran for a touch-down.

The team members huddled near the end of the final quarter. [Someone asked, "Who's going to tackle him? This is our last chance." One by one, the other team members offered their excuses: He's bigger than me. I already tried. It's not my job. Ask someone else.] Finally, they exited the huddle, the quarterback snapped the ball, and with just a few minutes left in the game, the rhinoceros caught the ball one more time and started up the field.

Suddenly, out of nowhere, he was brought down with a magnificent tackle. When the

animals unpled, it was discovered that the centipede had (for the first time) finally come into the game, and that it was, indeed, the centipede who had made the tackle. "That was fantastic!" shouted his teammates. "Great tackle! But look, it's the fourth quarter, and the game is almost over! Where on earth have you been all this time?"

The centipede answered, "I was putting on my shoes."<sup>4</sup>

It may not be your job to tackle a rhinoceros, nor to be a high priest and offer a blood sacrifice once a year, but God does invite you and me to bring hope to the world, to offer some kindness instead of harsh words, to offer hope instead of criticism, to offer a smile instead of ridicule, to offer peace rather than violence. It's our job. Your job. Our ministry as Disciples of Christ.

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<sup>4</sup> James Moore, *If God Has a Refrigerator, Your Picture Is on It*, 91-92 (adapted).

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.history.com/topics/holidays/labor-day-1>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.careercast.com/jobs-rated/2019-jobs-rated-report?page=0>

<sup>3</sup> Adapted from *1002 Humorous Illustrations* by Michael Hodgin, #260.