

**Sunday Sermon**  
**September 2, 2018**  
**James 1:17-27**  
**“Putting Faith to Work”**

### Introduction

When Dr. John Coleman was president at Haverford College in Philadelphia, he decided to spend his sabbatical time experiencing work at jobs considered menial, jobs where no one knew he had a Ph.D. or was president of a college. So that is what he did; and in one instance, he was fired from a job as a dishwasher.

Coleman said, “I’d never been fired, and I’d never been unemployed. For three days I walked the streets. Back home, I had a bank account, my children’s tuition was paid, I had a job and a salary waiting for me. Yet, I was demoralized. I had been fired. I had no work.”

I admit that some of the more difficult times in my life have been when I did not have work. Of course lack of employment brings financial stress. But it was more than that. I had been looking for identity and self-confidence from what I did rather than who I was called to be.

### I

An important emphasis in Christianity these days is the rediscovery of the meaning of vocation, this Latin *vocare* understanding of call as our vocation and what it means to answer God’s call in our lives. We Presbyterians believe that we answer God’s call in all areas of our lives. The way we live out there in our times of work and our leisure has as much to do with our faith as the way we worship in here. Whatever is our occupation or whatever occupies our time and focus these days that is our opportunity to serve God. It is all part of our calling as Christians.

“Be doers of the word, and not merely hearers,” the writer of James says. The mark of our vocation is not just what we hear during this hour in this place but what we do out there for the rest of the week.

David Lose says we should view churches as “vocational counseling centers,” places where we come to get clarification of our calling. Here we find that we are forgiven, called and bless. Here we become aware of God's presence and find meaning and purpose for being sent out there to be a part of God’s extraordinary work. (David Lose, [“Ordinary Saints,”](#) *Working Preacher*, 2012)

### II

This week I got to thinking about Bill Kendrick, a second cousin of our Ron Kendrick. Like Ron, Bill was not afraid of work. He could not be, he had his own business building houses. And Bill built houses well. Kendrick Construction always had a waiting list.

Bill had a reputation for giving attention to details and for doing things himself, rather than hiring them out, to make sure they were done right and to keep the costs down for his clients.

“He works all the time,” people would say, “Whatever he does, he does one hundred percent. You only get the best from Bill.”

The summer before I went to pastor the church where Bill was serving as an elder on the Session, the church sent a mission team to Mexico to build a house. Bill was on the team. And the Georgia Tech engineering grad made sure what they did was done right. The mission experience changed the life of the church, and it changed the life of Bill.

Folks said after the trip he seemed even more focused. He still worked just as hard building houses, but he seemed to be more centered as he worked. He brought that same focus to Session meetings.

And then a year and a half later, we buried Bill. He was killed on the side of the road by a hit and run driver when he stopped to help a woman with a flat tire. He was 43 years old.

This Labor Day weekend I keep thinking of Bill. A man with a strong work ethic who lived about half of the time most of us expect to live. Yet he had figured out the difference between his occupation and his vocation. His occupation, his work, was to build houses, which he did very well. But his calling, his vocation, was to follow Christ and to glorify God. And he focused his occupation and his life around his vocation, his calling as a Christian.

### III

Notice the startling claim the writer of James makes in the opening verse of this passage: “every generous act of giving...is from above.” Not some generous acts, but every generous act of giving. Every act of advocacy, or blessing, or justice, or kindness, or mercy, or support. All the good we do comes from above, from God. Which means that living out our vocation as Christians happens in all of our lives, in our homes, our places of work, paid and volunteer, in our schools and communities and more. Wherever, however we give of ourselves, God is at work through us. That is our calling; that is our vocation.

James Clyburn, a US congressman, says that when he left his home in Sumter, SC, many years ago to go to school, he thought he was on a path to follow in his father’s footsteps and go into the ministry.

“But in my junior year in college,” Clyburn said, “I decided I was going to change direction. It was a tough decision for me to make, and it was even tougher for me to tell my Dad. So I went home to tell him. I found him out in the garden, weeding. I walked up to him to tell him that I had decided not to go to seminary.

He stood there for what seemed like an eternity. Then he said to me, “You know, son, I suspect the world would much rather see a sermon than hear one.”

Clyburn said his never forgot his father's charge to live in a way that the world would see a sermon.

Years later serving in Congress, Clyburn called his pastor at the time to ask for guidance in a particular decision he had to make. His pastor said, "Before you make up your mind about this, why don't you go read the Book of James?"

Clyburn said, "I did read James, and I saw what my pastor was saying to me. The prevailing thought in that day, Clyburn said, was that one's faith was simply to be articulated, that it was enough just to express it. But the epistle of James takes issue with that, saying it is not enough to tell your brother and sister who come to you hungry or naked to go in faith. You act; you feed them and you clothe them, because faith without works is dead."

My mother-in-law used to say it does no good to kneel down to pray, if you do not get up and put legs on your prayers.

### Conclusion

These past months we have commissioned teams and individuals to go to all kinds of places, doing all kinds of missions serving in Christ's name, with people in Malawi Africa, with the homeless in Raleigh, with refugees on an island in the Bahamas, with women and children in New Orleans, with disaster survivors in Texas.

Today I am going to commission each of you, because each of you is God's co-worker and partner. No matter your age, no matter how you spend your days, you have a calling. So I ask all of you now to stand.

Here is your charge for this Labor Day Sunday: "Be doers of the word, and not merely hearers." In all that you do, do it to the glory of God: No matter what your occupation is or was, no matter your age or stage in life, you are called to act with justice, to love tenderly, to serve one another and walk and work humbly with your God.

Go live in a way that the world will see a sermon. Amen.