

**Don't Just Stand There**  
**Don Lincoln**  
**James 2: 14-18**

Every now and then - and it seems to be getting a little more frequent - somebody asks me, "So Don - when are you going to retire?" And you know what? It's absolutely uncanny how the inflection in the questioner's voice can impact the meaning and import of those 8 words!! "So Don....when **ARE** you going to retire?"

Fact is, I've retired a lot of times from a lot of things. My first job was mowing neighbors' lawns. Age 13. Retired from that. Until I got my own lawn 12 years later and picked that job back up again.

I painted houses as a teenager. Retired from that job too. I only paint my own house now - seven houses later, that has happened often enough.

My first actual paycheck and paystub where somebody actually took taxes out which was a real eye opening experience as a young man - came from a butcher shop - I was 15. Because of wasn't quite of the right age, I worked in the back - an interesting place in the back of a butcher shop. I worked in these big, stainless steel sinks, cleaning huge pans of the leftover stuff, knives, butcher blocks, slicers, grinders, etc. On occasion I went in the cold storage and punched the sides of beef hanging there. **5 years before** Rocky ever did!! I retired from that, and took a job as a delivery boy in a pharmacy. I retired from that, until 15 years later when I started delivering my young children to all their functions.

I worked second shift in a corrugated box factory two summers when in seminary - was a union worker - and made more money per hour than I ever did as a summer youth ministry intern - but retired from factory work when I got ordained. And for the past 37 years I've been in full-time pastoral ministry. When will I retire? Who knows? I'm determined to discern to retire about one week before one of you has to come in to tell me it is time to leave.

But when I do, I suspect like every other time in my life I will end up doing some other kind of work. It could be supply preaching, or teaching an occasional Sunday school class - like my predecessor Bob Young has done in the 20 years since he retired from full-time ministry. It could be framing houses with Habitat for Humanity (remember the tool belt I mentioned a few sermons ago?). It could be volunteering at the front desk of the hospital greeting people, looking up room numbers, giving directions.

Because the fact of the matter is, life without work - SOME kind of work - really isn't life. And I'm not counting using the remote control as work.

For some, it's sending cards to the sick and the lonely. For some – and we have a group going out today - taking communion to folks who are homebound from the life of this congregation. It will be their vocation today to extend our Table out into the community. There are some folks who every day begin working by looking over the prayer list as a member of this congregation's prayer chain and begin the labor of love praying. All fruitful, meaningful labors.

A couple weeks ago, a newspaper article reported a story this way: Mavis Wanczyk, a 53 year old hospital worker called her boss – “as one does after winning \$758 million in the Powerball” – and said she wouldn't be coming back to work. I thought to myself – she's gonna have a **WHOLE** lot of work to do! Fending off long lost cousins; figuring out tax shelters and investment planning – more work than she ever imagined would happen if such a thing took place. Most of us say we'd be **GLAD** to have her new job – but the fact of the matter is, there's always work to do – no matter what our station in life.

Because life is not a spectator sport; and neither is faith. I don't know where anyone got the idea that faith is for spectators.

Next week we'll begin a nine week Fall sermon series titled “Be The Church” – where we'll explore the reality that faith is not an intellectual exercise that has no bearing on one's life or one's behavior.

The Apostle Paul writes in Ephesians that we are saved by grace through faith alone – but James reminds us **NOT** by a faith that **IS** alone. True faith naturally, by its very nature, extends into actions. It is not only the direction of faith, but the **delight** of faith – the life-blood of faith – to be lived out – in practice, in impact, in justice, in love, in mercy, in hospitality, in sacrifice – the joyful labors of the kingdom.

And this began a long time ago, way before Labor Day was established as a holiday. All the way back in the beginning – recorded in Genesis – humankind was placed in the garden to be fruitful and multiply, to “till the garden and keep it.” Some of us have been taught to believe that work is a curse, and labor a misfortune of life, a necessary evil. Back in the very beginning of scripture we hear that tilling the garden and keeping it was a God-given privilege **BEFORE** the serpent. Labor is not something that happens and not a curse for **AFTER** the Fall! Till the garden and keep it God tells Adam and Eve.

Labor Day is a celebration of the worker, of production and how the workers have contributed to the economy, the nation. Genesis describes the privilege you and I have every day being co-participants in God's creative work in the world.

Which I think is why James writes – faith without works is dead. Or faith without works isn't faith. Asking whether it's faith or works is like asking whether it's more important to inhale or to exhale....

James makes it clear – faith without works is no faith. Faith without works is dead faith. Faith without works is not a living faith. An “All-talk-and-no-action” attitude is a sign of

faithlessness. Faith that does not produce the fruit of the spirit, or acts of compassion, or the work of justice is simply dead.

Charles Schultz, in his cartoon strip “Peanuts” brought home James’ point. It really brings home the point where he talks about the people who just preach but don’t do anything about it, who just say the words. If you knew Schultz, you know he knew scripture very well.

It is wintertime in the comic, and Linus and Lucy come upon Charlie Brown, who has fallen, and because of his heavy clothing, can’t maneuver himself and is unable to get up. Lucy says, “Go in peace, be warmed and be filled.” As the two continue walking, Linus says, “We’ll pray for an early spring.”

When you and I labor, we keep pace with what God is doing in the Kingdom. To be idle is to be a stranger to the seasons, to step out of life's procession marching toward the coming of God's kingdom in its fullness. When you and I work we fulfil a part of God's hopes for the world. When we do the work of love and life, we bind ourselves to one another – to neighbor and to God.<sup>1</sup>

There is something important about having meaningful things to do. I’m really grateful for the knowledge you and I have from the scriptures for the Christian – we have a vocation from which we NEVER retire. For it is our joy to do the labor of God’s work in the world.

What would it be if every day you and I got up and said to ourselves, “What is it I can do today – what kind of labor can I undertake – that would contribute to the unfolding of God’s Kingdom?” What if you and I saw every day as another opportunity to partner with God in fruitful labor, for the good of the world? May it be so. AMEN.

1. Some of the phrases in this paragraph have their roots in the words of Christian mystic Kahlil Gibran’s “The Prophet.”