

NO OTHER HANDS

Sunday July 4, 2016

The Very Rev. Ken Gray

St. Paul's Anglican Cathedral, Kamloops BC

One of the unread books on my shelf, and there are many, is Matthew Fox's *The Reinvention of Work*. The title interests me, as I have participated in work now for many decades, but am not sure what about work needs to be re-invented. Circumstances in the workplace are rapidly changing given new technologies; potential losses however include shifting expectations of managers and workers. Had we more time I would enjoy hearing your thoughts about work. Instead, hear these maxims from a compilation by Robert Christie in 1887.

- A work ill done must be twice done
- It's all in a day's work
- Church work goes on slowly
- Man's work is from sun to sun, Woman's work is never done.

In his letter to the Galatians (6:1-16) Paul talks about work:

All must test *their own work*; then *that work*, rather than *their neighbour's work*, will become a cause for pride.

All must carry their own loads.

You reap whatever you sow.

Whenever we have an opportunity, let us work for the good of all, and especially for those of the family of faith.

Paul clearly speaks to those who risk becoming "so heavenly minded they are of no earthly good." Idleness was a challenge for some Galatian Christians. Paul dignifies work and encourages us all to develop and express our craft and talent.

In a different context (Luke 10:1-11,16-20) Jesus said, "Then, as now "the harvest is plentiful, the workers are few."

(T)he Lord appointed seventy others and sent them on ahead of him in pairs to every town and place where he himself intended to go. He said to them, '**The harvest is plentiful, but the labourers are few;** therefore ask the Lord of the harvest to send out labourers into his harvest. Go on your way. See, I am sending you out like **lambs into the midst of wolves**.'

Jesus is testing the evangelical waters here. He sets up a trial outreach programme, not that tactfully to my mind. I mean, who would sign on for such a safari? "Lambs in the midst of wolves!" Only the most driven or desperate I suspect. Possibly what we see here is the coach's speech to the Icelandic football team prior to playing the British last week. But hey, look what happened. Never say "never."

Listen carefully to Jesus' comments on rejection. Sure, we all know the Gospel is good and cannot imagine anyone saying "no thanks" or "get out now" but trust me, it happens. Likely you know this yourself which may explain why so many of us are reluctant to share our faith with others.

The great American theologian and author Frederick Buechner once addressed a seminary graduating class with these words:

It is a crazy and foolish business to work for Christ in a world where most people most of the time don't give a hoot in hell whether you work for him or not. It is crazy and foolish to offer a service that most people most of the time think they need like a hole in the head. As long as there are bones to set and drains to unclog and children to tame and boredom to survive, we need doctors and plumbers and teachers and people who play the musical saw; but when it comes to the business of Christ and Christ's church, how unreal and irrelevant a service that seems even, and at times especially, to the ones who are called to work at it.

The church however, *our church*, needs persons to embody God's call to a hurting world. We baptized Anglicans have our own commission and passion. Additionally and as a community we invite some to take up particular orders. From a current report to General Synod on the diaconate we hear:

Ordination is the church's way of authorizing a person for leadership within the life of the church and in service to the world through selection with prayer and the laying on of hands. The language of "leadership" is recent. In earlier days it was called "ministry," but the function is similar. Those who lead are persons who bring focus to the life of a community, who initiate and manage its common activities. From their earliest roots, orders of ministry have also been given symbolic and organizational meaning. Through time and usage they have taken on sacramental significance. In this way, priests or presbyters are signs of the church's gathered, worshipping life, bishops are signs of the church's catholicity and unity, and deacons are signs of its lively presence in the world, especially where people are suffering or at risk.

Different orders and roles notwithstanding, Jesus's words apply to all.

"Whoever listens to you listens to me, and whoever rejects you rejects me, and whoever rejects me rejects the one who sent me."

Still, we carry on, through the centuries and through the circumstances of daily life, as Christ invites and provokes us, clergy and laity alike.

We laugh as the trainee evangelists return to tell their tale. With these early spiritual enthusiasts, with courage in our bones and a volatile love on our lips, with a restless spirit in the best sense of the word, opportunity will appear, again and again. Buechner again:

Our business is to be the hands and feet and mouths of one who has no other hands or feet or mouth except our own.