

## LIFE AS IT WAS MEANT TO BE

Scriptures: Genesis 2:4-9, 15-18; Genesis 3:8-19

In the movie *Grand Canyon* Kevin Kline plays a lawyer named Mack whose car breaks down late at night in a crime-riddled neighborhood of Los Angeles. He calls for a tow truck, but before it arrives he is surrounded by a gang. The gang leader shows him a gun and tells him to get out of the car. Just then the tow truck arrives driven by a large black man named Simon, played by Danny Glover. Simon hooks the car up to the tow truck. Then he says to the gang leader, "I'm asking of you a favor. This truck is my responsibility, and now the car is too. If anything happens to them, I lose my job. So I got to ask you to let me go my way here."

The gang leader says, "Are you asking me out of respect or are you asking me because I got the gun?"

Simon says to him, "Man, the world isn't supposed to work like this. Maybe you don't know that, but this isn't the way it is supposed to be. I'm supposed to be able to do my job without asking you if I can. That dude is supposed to be able to wait in his car without you ripping him off. Everything is supposed to be different than what it is."

That is exactly the point of both of our scripture readings this morning. Life in the world, including life at work and school, is not the way it was meant to be. This world was not meant to be the painful, frustrating, anger producing, life-sapping place it has become in the experience of many people. As the Bible says six times in the first chapter, the world was created good.

Open your pew Bibles again to our first scripture lesson from Genesis, chapter 2 (OT, p. 2). Look at verses 8-9:

And the Lord God planted a garden in Eden, in the east; and there he put the man whom he had formed. Out of the ground the Lord God made to grow every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food, the tree of life also in the midst of the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

Notice how God created the world with plenty of food. And not just food but beauty and truth and all the things that make life worth living. This world was not created to be a place where for some to have enough others must go without. That is not how it was meant to be.

Back to the movie *Grand Canyon*. The gang members finally let Mack and Simon go. Later in the movie Mack's wife Claire says to him, "The world doesn't make sense to me anymore. There are babies lying in streets. There are people living in boxes. There are people ready to shoot you if you look at them. And we're getting used to it."

That is the disturbing thing. We are getting used to it. We are getting used to a world where things are not the way they are supposed to be.

Which brings me to Genesis 2, verse 15. It says, “Then the Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to till it and keep it.” God created us to be caretakers of creation. Our job is to make life the blessing for people it was meant to be. That is the theological purpose of work and even of going to school: to make life the blessing for people it was meant to be.

If you think about it, work is really not bad in itself. You can tell because people who hate their jobs will in fact work very hard when they are doing something they like or believe in.

In his book *Craddock Stories*, Fred Craddock tells of seeing a busload of teenagers pull up to a church at the end of a mission trip. He writes,

It was the awfulest looking bunch of kids you’ve ever seen, something like the cats would drag in. They were really in bad shape. . . . They had just returned from a work mission. . . . In one week those young people, along with other young people, had built a little church for a community. They were beat. Aw, they looked terrible. They were sitting on their bags out there waiting for their parents to come. I said to the one of the boys, I said, “You tired?” And he said, “Whew—am I tired!” Then he said, “This is the best tired I’ve ever felt” (p. 94).

It is not work that makes our lives miserable. It is meaningless work, frustrating work, work that always seems undermined or underappreciated by other people. It is work that makes us feel exploited for someone else’s gain. It is work that seems to have no larger purpose.

Turn to the next page of your pew Bibles and look at our second scripture lesson from Genesis 3. This is after Adam and Eve have eaten the forbidden fruit, the fruit of the tree that God commanded them not to touch. In verses 17-19 God speaks to Adam,

And to the man he said, “Because you have listened to the voice of your wife, and have eaten of the tree about which I commanded you, ‘You shall not eat of it,’ cursed is the ground because of you; in toil you shall eat of it all the days of your life; thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you; and you shall eat the plants of the field. By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread until you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; you are dust, and to dust you shall return.”

Work was not meant to be a curse. It was only after sin came into the world that work became toil, that it produced thorns and thistles and frustration and disappointment. These things happened because people tried to *be* God rather than *serve* God. They put themselves at the center of the universe instead of God, which meant they lost sight of their purpose for being here.

This not only messed up work, it messed up everything. Look at verse 16. God says to the woman, “I will greatly increase your pangs in childbearing; in pain you shall bring forth children, yet your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you.” Raising children was not supposed to be painful. And husbands were not supposed to rule over wives. That is not how God meant it to be. Those things happened because sin came into the world. They happened when people replaced God with themselves, when they left no room in their lives for anything bigger than themselves. That is when work, school, and life became a curse.

But it does not have to be that way. Turn to one more Bible passage: Ephesians 6:5-8 (NT, p. 195). The Apostle Paul says,

Slaves, obey your earthly masters with fear and trembling, in singleness of heart, as you obey Christ; not only while being watched, and in order to please them, but as slaves of Christ doing the will of God from the heart. Render service with enthusiasm, as to the Lord and not to men and women, knowing that whatever good we do we will receive the same again from the Lord, whether we are slaves or free.

Notice how this scripture passage does not presume a pleasant work environment. It does not assume harmonious working relationships marked by equality and mutual respect. Your teacher may be nice, but maybe not. Your boss may treat you fairly and with dignity, or maybe not. Your co-workers may be easy and fun to work with, or maybe not. The other kids in your class may be kind, or maybe not. You cannot control that. You cannot control what other people are like or what other people do. All you can control is yourself. And you can serve God no matter what they do, Paul says. You can serve God by looking for whatever meaningful good you can do, given your circumstances.

The movie *Grand Canyon* is a series of vignettes about grace in a world that makes no sense. Claire decries a world where babies are left lying in the streets, but before the movie is over she and her husband have adopted one. Simon, the tow truck driver, not only uses his job to save Mack from a gang, he uses some of the money he earns to help his sister who is struggling as a single mother to raise two children in a violent neighborhood. Meanwhile Mack uses some contacts through his job to help Simon's sister find a safer place to live and in the process he even finds a new relationship for Simon himself. And in the climatic scene of the movie, Simon takes the whole lot of them on a nine hour drive to the Grand Canyon where all of these struggling, semi-messed up people stand in awe of something bigger than themselves.

I cannot make your environment at work or school a better place. But you can make it a more meaningful place. You can make it a witness to life as it was meant to be. You can make it a vignette of God's kingdom, even while we wait for its coming.

- Ken Onstot  
February 1, 2009