

Dear Friends in Christ,

We probably wouldn't have Labor Day if not for Martin Luther. It was Luther who recovered the dignity of labor. Before Luther the world looked down on manual labor as a curse of a fallen world. The blessed were those who were free from labor because of wealth or position. People in business were considered immoral because they dealt with filthy money and sought a profit. The spiritual removed themselves from commerce and industry and devoted themselves to prayer and contemplation. Priests, monks, and nuns served God. Common people were stuck in the world of greed and money.

According to Luther, in God's sight the labors on monks and priests was in no way superior to the world of a farmer or housekeeper. Scrubbing floors and changing diapers and banking and farming was just as God pleasing as preaching. Expecting a profit from one's work was not immoral. It was God's way of supporting those who provide the goods and services needed by the world. This honoring of the labor of the common people was one of the ways the Lutheran Reformation led to the development of the modern world and things like democracy and capitalism.

We work because we need to provide for ourselves and our families. But we also work because God has called us to work to provide goods and services for the world of people that God cares about. At the beginning of our work, we recognize that every generous act of service and every gift of labor come from the same source which is God. We can work only because God did the work of creation and continues to provide life, health, and gifts of creation. And God did it all without demanding payment from us.

God has called us to work, not as a curse, but as a means of fulfilling God's purposes in the world, to provide goods and services needed by the people God has created. We are doing the work of God when we tend the produce of the earth, when we create the materials and machinery needed by others, when we provide financial services, when we care for and teach children, when we cut hair, sell groceries and prepare food, when we sell and maintain cars, when we nurse the sick and the elderly, and when we do whatever else is needed. Whenever you do something that someone else needs, you are doing the holy work of God. And God has called us to do it for God's glory and for the good of God's people.

Someone has said that our calling from God is where our joy meets the world's need. God calls us to do the work that we feel best uses our strengths, abilities, and desires and that serves the needs of our neighbors. And God is pleased when we do that work with joy.

Yours in Christ, Phil Nielsen