

Good Morning and Happy Labor Day Weekend. I was asked earlier in the spring, by some very persuasive individuals here at the church, to speak today about Labor Day and my experience as a Christian in the work force. Of course I felt a little apprehensive about doing this, especially after telling my daughter Savannah and her response was You? But here I stand, humbly in front of you with a few words I hope you will be able to reflect on in the coming year.

Labor Day was originally organized to celebrate various labor associations' strengths and contributions to the United States economy which begun back in 1882. However, now it is more often just thought of as a holiday used for a day of rest or the last chance for many people to go on trips before the summer ends. Which is why I felt more confident about giving this sermon because I knew most of the church would be on their last summer fling!! And of course for most students, this the last weekend before school begins.

Not much thought is given to the actual term Labor Day anymore. So I took a moment to break it down. When we think of labor so many different things can come to mind:

Labor:

A physical or mental exertion, especially with exhausting work

A specific task or effort, especially a painful or arduous one

The process which child birth occurs

So given this context, labor certainly doesn't seem like an enjoyable task, although it is something most of us cannot ignore unless we happen to be heirs to a great fortune. However, as I looked back on my various jobs that I have labored in, there was always one factor that determined if the job would be a painful or arduous one as mentioned above or a labor of love, one I would describe as something to look forward to and enjoy on a daily basis.

This factor was simply the people I worked with and those who mentored me, especially the part about being mentored. Going into a new job can be tough and generally we all want to succeed and be seen as a contributor. However without help and guidance this can be a long and difficult road. Having someone to guide you can make this road delightful, like a Sunday drive in the country, not having someone may cause you to hit several potholes, run into traffic, dead ends and possibly a full head on collision, making going to work every day just misery. During our careers we would hopefully be mentored and then also provide mentoring.

Mentoring is not a new thing, it has been around for ages and as Christians we have been given abundant examples of this. The word mentor is defined as a wise and trusted counselor or teacher. Although the bible doesn't use the words mentor or mentee, it frequently refers to discipleship which is what we call a successful mentoring relationship.

Obviously, the first and foremost mentor relationship that comes to mind is Jesus and his disciples. Their job could definitely be described as painful and exhausting work; however, with Jesus as their teacher, everyday was filled with wonderment and miracles.

Jesus made his style of mentoring clear, he led, so that we can follow. The Apostle Paul also had his own unique mentoring type of leadership , simply “Follow my example as I follow the example of Christ” 1 Corinthians 11:1 “Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me or seen in me, put it to use. “

Philippians 4:9 Paul was very clear that he was mentored and he wished to mentor others.

Going back further there was Barnabas and Paul. Paul and Timothy, Namoi and Ruth, Mosses and Joshua. All are powerful examples of pairs and the god inspired actions they took to help each other develop.

I would like to focus on Moses and Joshua for a minute. Firstly who was Moses? A rather solitary leader, one with his people but set apart, even in his childhood, when he was raised by the pharaoh's daughter as if he were an Egyptian prince. Set apart also in that he married an alien wife—Midianite or possibly Ethiopian. Even his physical characteristics— he had a speech defect, which set him apart from others, yet God accommodated him by having his brother Aron speak for him. Moses role was unique to say the least—receiving the Law and seeing God.

So Moses was the man, most people would let this go to their head. They might be demanding on those that they work with or possibly not help them achieve a higher position for fear of them taking their job and surpassing them. Most of us have all worked with that type of person, they keep you in your place, they claim your accomplishments as their own and pretty much make labor a tedious task.

However Moses and Joshua illustrate a successful mentoring partnership. Moses demonstrated the wisdom of a mentor by deciding to delegate an important task to Joshua. He placed Joshua in command of a battle with the Amalekites over a water dispute. In making this decision, Moses demonstrated trust in Joshua's gifts and leadership potential. He opened the way for their ongoing teamwork. This is the first time Moses asked someone else to lead an attack, one of many that his "mentee" Joshua would command.

Did they sit down and negotiate this developmental relationship, calling each other mentor and mentee? Probably not. Yet the ingredients of mentoring were there, and Joshua entered a relationship with a respected man that changed Joshua's life forever.

Following this successful assignment, Joshua became a frequent companion of Moses. Their mentoring relationship deepened, and Joshua gained valuable knowledge, skills, and confidence.

Moses continued to mentor Joshua even allowing him to accompany Moses to an important meeting, with none other than God himself.

On still yet another day Moses took Joshua to meeting in a special tent where Moses spoke with God again. Joshua chose to stay at the tent after Moses left to remain on his own in the presence of God. Moses demonstrated significant trust by not interfering in this major opportunity for Joshua. How many bosses would let their subordinate hang out with other higher ups without their presence??

Moses continued to offer Joshua opportunities to develop. Finally, Moses affirmed Joshua by commissioning him in the presence of the people, giving public recognition for the lessons he learned and vacated his position to him.

Their formal mentoring relationship ended. When Moses died, Joshua was appointed as the new leader of Israel and later took his people into the Promised Land

Moses provided a great lesson in how to transfer leadership. A time comes to either step aside to allow our successors to lead in our place or allow them to move on to a place of leadership elsewhere. Moses gave the proper direction, teaching, and recognition to prepare Joshua to fulfill his role in life.

As Christians we hear these stories and so many more, we can only hope that we have the opportunity to work with such a great mentors and then become a successful mentors ourselves.

I was fortunate enough to experience two great mentors during my working career. I unfortunately also experienced a few not so good, which clearly made you appreciate the good ones!

After a few bad job choices coming out of college, I was hired by Mitsubishi International, an import/export firm in Atlanta. I reported directly to a Sr. VP who had just arrived from Japan. I was 23 and ready to conquer the world, however, I had no knowledge or experience on how to do this. My boss, Mr. Yoshikawa, was very much like a Moses in his leadership skills. He truly wanted to see me succeed and learn the business. He also wanted me to learn about Japan and how you could build successful working relationships between Japanese firms and American companies. He took me to every meeting, introduced me as a key person, gave me tough assignments knowing that it would help further me in my career. When I unfortunately made

an error, he was calm and explained the correct path I should have taken and he celebrated my accomplishments as well as promoted me in front of others. All this was being done at time when the Japanese Culture did not see women as business equivalents but rather as subservient individuals. This made no difference to him and when the time came to travel to Japan and meet the heads of the Coke Bottling companies, I was there by his side, learning the industry. I left this job with great self-confidence and spent the next 11 years raising a family. I often thought about how kind and helpful Mr. Yoshikawa was to me and tried to offer the same type of mentoring in the different volunteer positions I held during this time.

Finally when all my children were enrolled in school, I was offered a job with a government training company. How exciting to get back to work again after so long! I had that same feeling as when I was 23, now it was my time to get out there and do something great!! However, I knew nothing about this industry I was working in. But once again, I was extremely lucky to have a boss that wanted to see me succeed. He was happy to answer any question I might have, and I had loads of questions. As you may know, if you work with government, the language is filled with acronyms, making it very difficult. Mr. York was patient and kind and continuously answered what I felt were the same questions over and over. I loved being back at work and I loved learning.

The combination of Mr. Yorks mentoring me and my wanting to succeed, allowed me to advance very quickly. Before I knew it, I was the Chief of Staff and responsible for 200 full time employees. At this point, I was then able to use mentoring techniques that Mr. Yoshikawa and Mr. York had taught me to help others. It made me extremely happy to see individuals be successful and achieve their dreams.

Now that I have started my own business, I try to help those people that really want to succeed. Several times individuals have come to me thinking they may be hopeless and we have worked together to jump start their careers and it is very gratifying for me to see this.

As cliché as it may sound, I often find myself saying “What would Jesus Do??” and then I find myself reflecting on the many lessons of the bible.

So without Christianity and its messages of love and forgiveness, and leadership, where does that leave an individual in the work place?

Joe Manous recently sent out a video that certainly addressed this. It talked about an interview with a Marxist Economist from China who had been studying at Harvard. He was asked if he had learned anything surprising and unexpected. He immediately replied he had no idea how critical religion was to the functioning of democracy. He said he felt the reason why democracy works is not because the government was designed to oversee what everyone does, but rather most people voluntary choose to obey the law. And in the past most Americans attended a church, synagogue, or place of worship every week and were taught by people they respected and were reminded of God’s love and doing what was right. Americans followed these rules because

they came to believe that they just weren't accountable to society but they were accountable to God. So this man goes on to say that his concern is that as religion loses its influence over the lives of Americans, what will happen to our democracy? Where will these institutions be that will need to teach the next generation of Americans that they too need to obey the laws.

So to recap, as we celebrate Labor Day, I hope many of you can reflect on an individual who definitely made a positive impact as you progressed through your career. I hope you are able to reflect on how you may have made a positive impact on someone's life just as Jesus did with so many people. I hope that we can keep the love of God as a means of democracy within our nation with people choosing to obey the laws and doing what is right because it is the right thing to do, not because of the fear of punishment.

Labor should be seen as love and not tedious and arduous effort.

So to that end I wish all of you Happy Labor Day!!

- Jane Flowers, St. Luke's Episcopal Church