



Whatever You Do
1 Corinthians 10:23–33 (CEB)
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Rev. Brittany Porch
Broad Street Presbyterian Church
Columbus, Ohio

Everything is permitted, but everything isn't beneficial. Everything is permitted, but everything doesn't build others up. No one should look out for their own advantage, but they should look out for each other.

Eat everything that is sold in the marketplace, without asking questions about it because of your conscience. *The earth and all that is in it belong to the Lord.* If an unbeliever invites you to eat with them and you want to go, eat whatever is served, without asking questions because of your conscience. But if someone says to you, "This meat was sacrificed in a temple," then don't eat it for the sake of the one who told you and for the sake of conscience. Now when I say "conscience" I don't mean yours but the other person's. Why should my freedom be judged by someone else's conscience? If I participate with gratitude, why should I be blamed for food I thank God for?

So, whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, you should do it all for God's glory. Don't offend either Jews or Greeks, or God's church. This is the same thing that I do. I please everyone in everything I do. I don't look out for my own advantage, but I look out for many people so that they can be saved.

I can't shut off being a mom.

When I come to work, I'm still a mom. In fact, you all get a front-row seat to that many Sundays.

When I'm out with friends, I'm still a mom.

When I go on a hike by myself, I'm still a mom.

I'm always noticing children, wondering whether my own kids remembered their lunches, I am mentally making grocery lists, or thinking to myself, *Wow, my kids would love this.*

I try my best to not take off being a Christian either.

When I'm buying a car, I still want my values to shape my choices. When I'm cheering at a sporting event, I try to still carry my faith with me. Whether I'm coaching soccer, sitting in a meeting, or talking with a neighbor, I don't stop belonging to Christ just because I'm no longer sitting in the sanctuary/courtyard.

Now, of course, we all compartmentalize our lives to some degree.

Sometimes we have to.

Sometimes it's about professionalism. Sometimes it's about safety. Sometimes it's simply about focusing on the task in front of us.

But I think Paul, in today's passage, is inviting us into something deeper.

An integrated life.

A life where our faith isn't something we put on for an hour on Sunday and then hang back in the closet until next week.

Paul writes:

"Looking at it one way, you could say, 'Anything goes.' ... But the point is not to just get by. We want to live well, but our foremost efforts should be to help others live well."

I love that.

The goal isn't simply asking:

"Am I allowed to do this?"

But rather:

"Will this help my neighbor live well?"

That changes everything.

Because suddenly our faith isn't confined to church. It follows us wherever we spend our time: into our workplaces and schools, and our homes and neighborhoods.

And with Labor Day around the corner / *because this is Labor Day weekend*, I have been thinking especially about the places where many of us spend so much of our time: at work.

This week, I have been listening to Dolly Parton on repeat. While preparing this sermon, I found myself singing along to "9 to 5," and the song landed a little differently. It is catchy and funny, but underneath all that energy is a protest against work that uses people up, work where gifts are overlooked, wages are not enough, and someone else benefits from your labor.

The song insists that work matters, but workers matter more.

That is the heart of Labor Day.

Labor Day began because people insisted that workers were more than machines.

Children should not spend their days in factories.

Workers deserved reasonable hours.

Families deserved time together.

People deserved rest.

In other words, people were more valuable than what they produced.

The Bible has been saying that all along.

From the very beginning, God gives humanity meaningful work.

And just as importantly, God gives humanity Sabbath.

We are called to work.

We are also called to remember that our worth is never measured by our work alone.

Work matters.

Rest matters.

Because people matter.

And that led me to think about vocation.

Now, when I say vocation, I don't simply mean your career.

Vocation includes paid work, but it also includes unpaid work like studying, raising children, caring for family, volunteering, and looking for work.

The Christian tradition has always understood vocation as something much bigger than employment.

Vocation is response.

God calls.

We answer.

Sometimes people think vocation is about finding the *right* job.

I think vocation is simpler than that.

It is paying attention.

It is noticing where God is already at work in the world and saying, "I'll help."

That may happen in a classroom or at a desk. It may happen in your family's kitchen or in a Food Pantry.

Your vocation is not simply how you earn a living.

Let me say that again.

Your vocation is one of the primary places God loves the world through you.

There are a few people who make me think about that—people who make me say, "Wow. They have really found their calling."

Rick Steves.

Rick Steves is, yes, the travel guru. But he does more than simply teach people how to travel. He has spent his career inviting us to see other cultures with curiosity instead of fear, helping us discover neighbors instead of strangers.

He is also a deeply faithful person who often talks about the connection between his Christian faith and his work. Travel, for him, is not simply about checking places off a list. It is about becoming more open, more compassionate, and more connected to the world.

Then there is Jim Cantore. And if you are from hurricane alley, like I am, you know the name Jim Cantore.

Jim Cantore is a weather reporter who specializes in hurricane coverage.

And if Jim Cantore shows up in your hometown, you had better start boarding your windows and making an evacuation plan, because he is nearly always right about where the storm is headed.

Most of us run away from hurricanes.

Jim Cantore runs toward them.

He puts himself close to danger so other people can understand what is coming and get out of danger.

His passion is not simply the storm itself. His work helps communities prepare and families make wise decisions.

That is what vocation can look like: bringing your gifts, your skill, and your passion to work that helps your neighbors live well.

And recently, I met someone whose name / *almost* / no one in this room would recognize, Jessy.

I was able to travel to Peru this summer with a group of adults and high school youth from Broad Street Presbyterian church. When we were in Peru, we met Jessy, the director of the country's only public school for deaf students.

Jessy began her career as a teacher.

But she kept noticing something she could not unsee.

There were deaf children sitting in classrooms with no language.

They didn't know Spanish.

They didn't know Peruvian Sign Language.

Imagine going to school every day and not having a language.

She could have said, "Someone should do something."

Instead, she went back to school herself.

She learned Peruvian Sign Language.

She changed the direction of her career.

Today, she leads that school, making sure children who were once invisible are now seen. These children have language, education, friendship, and community.

That is vocation.

Not because she found the perfect job.

Because she noticed where love was needed and developed her skills to match. She responded.

Her vocation became one of the primary places God loved the world through her.

Sometimes it begins with seeing something you can no longer ignore.

Which reminds me of another teacher.

In 1960, six-year-old Ruby Bridges became the first Black child to attend William Frantz Elementary School in New Orleans.

Most of you know this part of the story, but stay with me.

Every morning, Ruby walked through crowds of angry white protesters.

Parents removed their children from the school.

Teachers refused to teach her.

Except one.

Barbara Henry had just moved to New Orleans to be closer to her husband's family. It was her very first day at her new school.

She arrived and found crowds shouting outside.

She later remembered that no one in the crowd knew her, and because her skin matched the skin of the protesters, she was able to walk through the barricades without anyone noticing.

She was frightened.

But she walked through the crowd.

She rang the doorbell.

And she went to work.

Her classroom had one student.

Ruby.

Because no other teacher would teach her.

Barbara Henry became everything Ruby needed a first-grade teacher to be. She taught her reading, math, music, art, gym, and phonics.

Every day, it was just Ruby, Ms. Henry, and the federal marshal keeping watch nearby.

The days did not necessarily get easier, but Ms. Henry became more comfortable.

She said every day was a joy because Ruby was a joy.

Someone later asked Barbara Henry why she did it.

She did not describe herself as a civil rights leader.

She did not describe herself as particularly courageous.

She simply said:

"I was interested in teaching children, no matter where they came from or whatever the color of their skin was."

That is vocation.

Not because she planned to become part of the Civil Rights Movement.

Because she refused to let fear redefine what it meant to be a teacher.

She refused to stop being the kind of teacher every child deserved.

She showed up.

She brought her whole self into her work.

Years later, Barbara Henry and Ruby Bridges reconnected after decades apart. They began speaking together around the country, encouraging others to believe that ordinary people can do something courageous, noble, worthwhile, and good.

One teacher.

One child.

History changed.

So, I wonder:

What have you noticed that you can no longer ignore?

Pause.

Maybe it is a neighbor who needs their lawn mowed, a child who needs another caring adult, a new employee who seems lost, or someone beside you who is quietly having a difficult time.

Vocation is work, just some of it's paid labor and some of it's not.

Your vocation may not make headlines.

Most vocations don't.

Barbara Henry was not famous then, and I had not heard of her until this summer.

Jessy in Peru is not famous either.

The kingdom of God is often built by ordinary people who notice where love is needed and offer their lives there.

So this week, wherever you go—to work, to school, to a volunteer shift, or to care for someone you love, — remember this:

You do not leave your faith at the church doors.

Christ goes with you into every meeting, every lesson, every conversation, every act of care and every moment of courage.

Because your vocation is not simply how you earn a living.

It is one of the primary places God loves the world through you.

Amen.