
Worship Service

BY JEANIE MILEY

A Service to Commemorate
the Place of Work in Daily Life

The Chiming of the Hour

Silent Meditation

Work is love made visible.

Kahlil Gibran (1883-1931)¹

Gathering Hymn

“Holy, Holy, Holy”

Holy, holy, holy! Lord God Almighty!
Early in the morning our song shall rise to thee;
holy, holy, holy, merciful and mighty!
God in three Persons, blessed Trinity!

Holy, holy, holy! all the saints adore thee,
casting down their golden crowns around the glassy sea;
cherubim and seraphim falling down before thee,
who wert, and art, and evermore shalt be.

Holy, holy, holy! though the darkness hide thee,
though the eye made blind by sin thy glory may not see;
only thou art holy; there is none beside thee,
perfect in power, in love, and purity.

Holy, holy, holy! Lord God Almighty!
All thy works shall praise thy name, in earth and sky and sea;
holy, holy, holy! merciful and mighty,
God in three persons, blessed Trinity!

Reginald Heber (1826), alt.

Tune: NICAEA

Invocation

Loving God, we gather in your name on this day.

You are Lord, and we acknowledge your holiness.

We come to you as your people, created by you.

We acknowledge that you have made us in your image.

*May the words of our mouths and the meditations of our hearts
be pleasing in your sight,*

O Lord, our Rock and our Redeemer.²

And may the imaginations of our minds and the works of our hands
be pleasing to you,

our Creator and Sustainer.

May we continually seek your guidance

in the work we do in partnership with you.

May the favor of the Lord our God rest on us;

establish the work of our hands for us –

yes, establish the work of our hands.³

Amen.

Old Testament Reading: Genesis 2:1-15

Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all their multitude. And on the seventh day God finished the work that he had done, and he rested on the seventh day from all the work that he had done. So God blessed the seventh day and hallowed it, because on it God rested from all the work that he had done in creation. These are the generations of the heavens and the earth when they were created.

In the day that the LORD God made the earth and the heavens, when no plant of the field was yet in the earth and no herb of the field had yet sprung up—for the LORD God had not caused it to rain upon the earth, and there was no one to till the ground; but a stream would rise from the earth, and water the whole face of the ground—then the LORD God formed man from the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and the man became a living being. 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.

A river flows out of Eden to water the garden, and from there it divides and becomes four branches. The name of the first is Pishon; it is the one that flows around the whole land of Havilah, where there is

gold; and the gold of that land is good; bdellium and onyx stone are there. The name of the second river is Gihon; it is the one that flows around the whole land of Cush. The name of the third river is Tigris, which flows east of Assyria. And the fourth river is the Euphrates.

The LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to till it and keep it.

A Reading

Somewhere along the line, Adam got a bad rap, or at least the God of Adam did. Someone somewhere misread the story of Creation and Fall, and came to the conclusion that work was the result of the Fall, not part of God's original design for human beings. On closer inspection, it is perfectly clear that God's good plan always included human beings working, or, more specifically, living in the constant cycle of work and rest.

*Ben Witherington III*⁴

Response of the People

**Creator God, may the work that we do and the fruit of our labor
contribute to the good of your creation and benefit your people.**

New Testament Reading: Matthew 25:14-30

"For it is as if a man, going on a journey, summoned his slaves and entrusted his property to them; to one he gave five talents, to another two, to another one, to each according to his ability. Then he went away. The one who had received the five talents went off at once and traded with them, and made five more talents. In the same way, the one who had the two talents made two more talents. But the one who had received the one talent went off and dug a hole in the ground and hid his master's money. After a long time the master of those slaves came and settled accounts with them. Then the one who had received the five talents came forward, bringing five more talents, saying, 'Master, you handed over to me five talents; see, I have made five more talents.' His master said to him, 'Well done, good and trustworthy slave; you have been trustworthy in a few things, I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your master.' And the one with the two talents also came forward, saying, 'Master, you handed over to me two talents; see, I have made two more talents.' His master said to him, 'Well done, good and trustworthy slave; you have been trustworthy in a few things, I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your master.' Then the one who had received the one talent also came forward, saying, 'Master, I knew that you were a harsh man, reaping where you

did not sow, and gathering where you did not scatter seed; so I was afraid, and I went and hid your talent in the ground. Here you have what is yours.' But his master replied, 'You wicked and lazy slave! You knew, did you, that I reap where I did not sow, and gather where I did not scatter? Then you ought to have invested my money with the bankers, and on my return I would have received what was my own with interest. So take the talent from him, and give it to the one with the ten talents. For to all those who have, more will be given, and they will have an abundance; but from those who have nothing, even what they have will be taken away. As for this worthless slave, throw him into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.'"

Response of the People

**Loving God, may we be responsible and faithful to do
what has been entrusted to us to do.
May we work with joy and with love.**

The Written Word of God for the people of God.
**Thanks be to God for the written word.
Thanks be to God for the Living Word.**

Hymn

"Joyful, Joyful, We Adore Thee"

Joyful, joyful, we adore thee,
God of glory, Lord of love;
hearts unfold like flowers before thee,
opening to the sun above.

Melt the clouds of sin and sadness;
drive the dark of doubt away;
giver of immortal gladness,
fill us with the light of day!

All thy works with joy surround thee,
earth and heaven reflect thy rays,
stars and angels sing around thee,
center of unbroken praise.

Field and forest, vale and mountain,
flowery meadow, flashing sea,
singing bird and flowing fountain
call us to rejoice in thee.

Thou art giving and forgiving,
ever blessing, ever blest,
well-spring of the joy of living,
ocean-depth of happy rest!

Thou our Father, Christ, our Brother –
all who live in love are thine;
teach us how to love each other,
lift us to the joy divine.

Mortals, join the mighty chorus
which the morning stars began;
love divine is reigning o'er us,
bringing all within its span.

Ever singing, march we onward,
victors in the midst of strife;
joyful music leads us sunward,
in the triumph song of life.

Henry Van Dyke (1907)

Tune: HYMN TO JOY

Two Readings

First Reader:

Our work, seen from the point of view of Scripture,
has deep significance for us.

Whether it is done as a volunteer or as a paid worker,
what we do matters.

It matters to those of us who do the actual labor,
and it matters to those who benefit from what we do.

Whether we work with our minds or our hands,
we participate with others and with God
in making life easier, better, or more beautiful for others.

Whether we work on an assembly line or in a research lab,
in a nursery school or a graduate school,
in a field or in an office
at home or out of the home,
and whether we are paid much or little,
work gives meaning and purpose to our lives.

Second Reader:

When we see work as tedium or unimportant,
we diminish ourselves or others.

Experienced as toil and burden,
our work steals our life from us.

Seen as a calling,
work is lifted to a higher plane.

Recognized as an essential part of being human,
work becomes infused with holiness.

We may work to put bread on the table and pay the bills;
we may work to express our unique gifts and calling.

We sometimes work to help other people,
to save their lives, or point them toward God.

Sometimes we work to make life sparkle,
to entertain others, touch their hearts, or make them want to dance.

When we take work seriously and as a partnership with the Creator,
we participate with God's work in the world.

When we work as stewards of God's creation, our work becomes
a gift to God, a blessing to others, and a labor of love for ourselves.

Silent Reflection

Always you have been told that work is a curse and labor a misfortune.
But I say to you that when you work
you fulfill a part of earth's furthest dream,
assigned to you when that dream was born,
and in keeping yourself with labor you are in truth loving life.
And to love life through labor is to be intimate with life's inmost secret.

*Kahlil Gibran*⁵

Prayer of Confession

God of creation, we confess that we sometimes complain too much
about the burden of good work or the tedium of it. We complain
about not being appreciated for what we do or paid what we feel we
deserve.

Lord, have mercy.

We confess that at times we are blind to the importance of others' work and their investment in our comfort. We do not honor and respect those who labor for our benefit. We take them and the work they do for granted.

Lord, forgive our negligence.

We confess that we sometimes do our work half-heartedly. We fuss about whose task is more important, and we bring negative thoughts and resentful actions into our workplaces—in our home, our church, our school, the marketplace, and our volunteer assignments.

Lord, take away our sins.

We confess that sometimes we take our ability to work or the freedom to work as we choose for granted. We label our jobs as burdens and forget the privilege of having a job.

Lord, change our hearts and minds.

We confess that sometimes we use work as an idol or an escape. We give first priority to what is urgent and neglect what is important. We struggle with competing agendas.

Lord, help us put first things first.

God, hear our prayers.

Pastoral Prayer

Patient and compassionate Lord,
you understand our need for forgiveness seventy times seven.

You are the God of second chances, and more:
you have shown us your mercy more times than we can remember;
your work, Loving God, is the work of forgiveness and redemption.

Once again, forgive us for missing the mark.
Forgive our mistaken ideas, our half-hearted efforts, and our laziness.

Grant us the opportunity to begin again,
and to do our work better.

Give us the strength and the stamina to do what is hard.
Give us the patience and the endurance to do what is boring.
And in all that we do, give us glad hearts to do what is ours to do.

May we be lovers of life, like you, O God.
May we be joyful servants and stewards of your world.

Work in us a good work,
so that we might work for you. Amen.

Hymn

“Praise God, from Whom All Blessings Flow”

Praise God, from whom all blessings flow;
praise him, all creatures here below;
praise him above, ye heavenly host;
praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.
Amen.

Thomas Ken (1674)

Tune: OLD HUNDREDTH

Sermon

Offering

Invite congregants to bring to the altar either symbols of their work or index cards with the name of their work written on the card. This offering action should to be announced prior to the service and cards provided for those who do not bring symbols.

Declaration

On this altar are symbols or written expressions of the varieties of work we do during the week in stores and warehouses and offices, in schools or our homes, out in the fields or at our desks.

We are a people blessed to contribute to others through our work, and in the economy of God, there are no small jobs. In God’s eyes, there are no insignificant workers and no unimportant work.

We are blessed to have work to do, and we are blessed to share our work with each other. Let us offer ourselves and our work to God.

Hymn of Dedication

“I Offer All I Am to You”

I offer all I am to you,
my mind and heart and soul;
take now my efforts, small or large,
take all as gifts to you.

I give to you, Creator God,
the gifts you gave to me;
and if I stumble, fall, or fail,
help me begin anew.

Take now my strivings, weak or strong,
use me to help or heal;
for all you give, I thank you now,
and pledge my faithfulness.

I take my place within your world,
my will and way are yours:
bring forth the work that's mine to do,
use what I do for good.

Make holy by your presence here
the labor and the fruit;
inspire, create, fulfill your plan,
make blessing of my work.

Jeanie Miley (2015)

Tune: AZMON

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Benediction

May the grace of God inspire you in your work and in your ways.
May the love of God fill you with love for life, for each other,
and for the work of your mind, your hands, and your feet.
May the joy of the abiding presence of the Living Christ
be near and constant in you.
And may the mercy of God keep you safe
and guard your mind and heart until we meet again.
Amen.

NOTES

1 Kahlil Gibran, "On Work," *The Prophet* (1923).

2 Based on Psalm 19:14 (NIV). Scripture passages marked "NIV" are from THE HOLY BIBLE, NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION® NIV®, Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984 by International Bible Society®. Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide.

3 Psalm 90:17 (NIV).

4 Ben Witherington III, *Work: A Kingdom Perspective on Labor* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2011), 2.

5 Gibran, "On Work," *The Prophet*.



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