

Sermon preached by The Rev. Charles Rowins at St. Christopher-by-the-Sea, Gibson Island, Maryland, 12th Sunday after Pentecost, September 1, 2019.

Let me guess what you are thinking. What do our lessons today have to do with Labor Day? And, who is Sirach anyway? And, if the Corinthians live in Corinth, and the Colossians live in Colossae, and the Philippians live in Philippi, where do the Hebrews live?

Well, let's save the application to Labor Day for last. Which means that we will start with Sirach (**Sirach 10:12-18**). He's a thinker. And what he thinks about is wisdom. What's the best way to live one's life.

The Book of Sirach is sometimes called the Wisdom of Sirach. This book is one of several in a collection of books called the Apocrypha. This collection appears in some Bibles, but not all. The word "Apocrypha" means "hidden" or "in between" or "we're not quite sure what to do with these books." In a way, the books are a kind of link between the Old and New Testaments, and it is well that we are exposed to them, as we are today.

So what is the wisdom in this particular lesson? Well, the author gets right to it. "The beginning of human pride is to forsake the Lord; the heart has withdrawn from its Maker." In other words, we have lost touch with our Creator, and, by extension, with those who speak for our Creator. It's not wise to lose touch with one's Creator.

We attend a number of Orioles games, and when we're not at the stadium, we watch the games on TV, including the pre and post shows. One of the commentators is former Oriole Rick Dempsey, and one of his favorite pearls of wisdom is "Nothing good comes from a walk." Make the batter work for a hit. Don't make it easy on the batter.

This is baseball wisdom. Sirach's version is "Nothing good comes from ignoring one's Creator." It's simple. It's easy to understand. And, more to the point, it's true. This is why we give our children Bibles. Bibles contain wisdom. Our children are better off being exposed to this wisdom than not exposed. The logic is clear. To neglect this wisdom is to risk "unheard of calamities," to quote Sirach.

Moving on. **Psalm 112**. More wisdom. “Hallelujah! Happy are they who fear the Lord and have great delight in his commandments.” We gather weekly because we have found this to be true.” If our experience was different, we wouldn’t bother. But we’re here. We do bother. We do seek the wisdom of Scripture. We do give thanks for the Lord Jesus.

Now to the lesson from Hebrews (**Hebrews 13:1-8, 15-16**). Unlike Sirach, Hebrews is one of the books of the New Testament. It exists on this side of the birth, life, death and resurrection of Jesus.

We’re not sure who the author of this book is, but we do know its intent. The author is speaking to those Jews who have doubts about Jesus being the Messiah. Some Jews did believe. These were the first Christians. But most Jews did not believe that that Messiah had finally arrived. These were the people for whom The Book of Hebrews was written.

This book is a pep talk, not to the un-religious, but to those who weren’t sure. See the encouraging language from the first verse of today’s passage: “let mutual love continue ... do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers ... keep doing all that you were doing only now do it with the confidence that your faith has been fulfilled.”

In the course of this pep talk, traditional Jewish wisdom is endorsed. “Remember those in prison ... let marriage be held in honor keep your lives free from the love of money do not neglect to do good and to share what you have.” A New Testament book grounded in the Old Testament. Very solid stuff. Wisdom indeed.

And now to the passage from Luke’s gospel (**Luke 14:1, 7-14**). Jesus is a disrupter, and therefore he is under scrutiny. The Pharisees are watching every move. Not just what Jesus does, but what he says. And much of what he says is in form of parables. “Those who exalt themselves – think Pharisees - will be humbled, and those who humble themselves – the common folks - will be exalted.”

This is wisdom too. This is the kind of guidance we give to our children. This is the guidance we hope our parents gave to us. When we see loved ones who begin to see themselves as somehow better than others, we step in and have a talk about humility. We don’t want our children to have swelled heads. Proud? Absolutely. But “Better than”? No.

Okay, we've covered our bases in terms of today's lessons. What then is the application to Labor Day? What is the connection between wisdom and labor?

Labor Day began as a tribute to labor organizations. It was fairly specific. Honor those who do the hard work in support of the nation. Give a shout-out to those whose efforts are often taken for granted. Take steps to bring into a more favorable alignment sacrifice and compensation.

One of our daughters is a public school teacher in Los Angeles. She and her colleagues went on strike for such an alignment. She has been teaching for over twenty-five years, but this was her first strike. And she was energized. She marched. She made placards. Her husband and children marched with her. And concessions were granted. A salary raise and back pay and some other benefits.

She recognized that she and her colleagues had power, and that they had strong community support. She and many others felt that for too long the work of teachers had been under-appreciated. Labor Day was now very personal for these teachers.

And maybe that's what Labor Day should be about for all. Thanksgiving for hard work, whatever the work and whoever the worker. Not just one kind of labor, but for all who contribute to the common good. Not just organized labor, but individual effort that often goes unnoticed. As there is a variety of gifts, so there is a variety of expression of these gifts.

All count, if offered in an appreciative manner. And the appreciation needs to come not just from the one benefitting from the work, but from the one doing the work. Also, employers are as important to the mix as those who actually perform the labor. Recruiting and hiring and training people is hard work. And don't forget those who dream, those who experiment, those who honor, those who highlight, those who call attention.

In other words, Labor Day is for all of us, whatever our standing, whatever our role, whatever our contribution, whatever our benefit. Labor is what we offer to one another and to the Lord. Doing the Lord's work can involve a shovel and it can involve a prayer and it can involve both. There is plenty of meaningful work of all sorts to do. A sentiment expressed in our opening hymn today: "And to each servant does the Master say, 'Go work today.'" Wisdom indeed. Amen.

