

September 3, 2017

“*The Repairman*”

John Wesley United Methodist Church

Matthew 11:28-30

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Hello? Hello? Did I miss it? Did I miss summer, or what? It's already Labor Day! Which means kids and grandkids are back to school, house guests are gone, and we get Falmouth back to ourselves again. Yes now we can all fall back into our “regular” routines, whatever they may be. But in seriously thinking about Labor Day, this holiday, like so many of our holidays, certainly has changed from what its founders in the late 1800's envisioned. It was meant to celebrate the American worker and the labor movement. Now, it simply marks the last weekend of summer.

So let's take a moment and be different, and think of all those who work, or have worked, in America today. Which is basically all of us. There can be no denying that we workers, whatever our profession or trade, have contributed to the strength, prosperity and well-being of this country. That “American work ethic” is deeply ingrained, something innate in most of us. I think that’s why we seem to love and romanticize the working person. We've all heard of “Rosie the Riveter” during WWII. Or, you can go to almost any party or wedding reception and they still end up dancing to that disco song, *YMCA*, by the group, The Village People. Those guys all wore outfits that depicted men who worked or labored. There was a policeman, a construction worker, a soldier, an Indian chief, and a cowboy. And how about all those Dunkin Donut commercials that show people drinking Dunkin Donuts coffee while doing their work. “America Runs on Dunkin” is the tag line. Yes, we hold the working person in great esteem, because we all know, we have to work and labor in this life, don’t we? And we work, not only to make a living – putting food on the table and a roof over our head. But we also work to make a life. To make a future for ourselves and our children. To make a positive contribution to society. To find fulfillment. And as we go through this life, we all know that sometimes does or does not happen. I think this is so aptly illustrated by the poem, *A Bag of Tools*, by R.L. Sharpe. Let me read it to you. *Isn't it strange that princes and kings, and clowns that caper in sawdust rings, and common people like you and me, are builders for eternity? Each of us is given a bag of tools, a shapeless mass, a book of rules. And each must make, before life is flown, a stumbling-block or a stepping-stone.*

Stumbling blocks or stepping stones. You see, as hard as we work trying to make a life, trying to build stepping stones, it seems so often we find ourselves running into stumbling blocks. Take our jobs for example. Some of you are under pressure to produce greater results, and you’re forced to work longer

hours, creating more stress for you and your families. And speaking of work, look at the work we put into our marriages and relationships, but often find them broken. We can't seem to communicate with each other, we feel misunderstood, taken for granted, unloved. We work at teaching and raising our children, only to be disappointed in their behavior. We work at trying to stay healthy, then learn we're struck with an illness. We work at trying to do the right things in life, only to be shot down by other people, by employers, by government, but most often, if we're truthful, by ourselves. And so, is it any wonder that those stumbling blocks become almost too much to handle. And we ask ourselves why, what happened?

I often quote Pastor Fred Craddock, a favorite of mine, because he's such a "down home" kind of preacher. And he tells a down home yarn about a conversation he once had with a dog – a greyhound dog, in fact. He says, "I was visiting a home not long ago where they had adopted a greyhound that had been a racer. He was a big old spotted greyhound, lying there in the den in front of the fireplace. One of the kids in the family, just a toddler, was pulling on its tail, and a little older kid had his head on the old dog's stomach, using it for a pillow. But that old dog didn't mind, he just seemed so happy. So I started a conversation with the dog. "Uh, are you still racing?" "No, no, I don't race anymore," replied the dog. So I asked, "Do you miss all the glitter and excitement of the track?" "No, no," he said. "Well, what's the matter? You got too old?" "No, no, I still had a lot of race left in me." "Well, did you not win?" He laughed, "No, no, I won over a million dollars for my owner." "Then what was it, bad treatment?" "Oh no, they treated us royally when we were winning." I persisted, "Then what? Did you get crippled?" He said, "No, no, no." Exasperated, I said, "Then what happened?" And the dog said, "I quit." "You quit?" I asked. "Yeah, I quit." Shaking my head, I said, "Why did you quit?" And he replied, "I discovered that what I was chasing was not really a rabbit. And I quit." He looked at me and said, "All that running, running, running, running, and what I was chasing was not even real."

Couldn't this be the cause of our stumbling blocks? In our quest of working to make a life, we end up chasing the wrong things. Chasing things that are not real. Like when we think our identity and fulfillment is found in things of this world. We say we just want to be "comfortable" in life, but we really aren't satisfied with comfort. We want abundance instead. So we put more pressure on ourselves, and our credit report. Or, look at our kids or grandkids, and how we've allowed the culture to shape them - putting all sorts of expectations on them. How they look, what they wear, who they hang out with. Perhaps so many of them go astray, because in our quest to chase "things," we haven't taken

the time to teach them, or show them proper Christian values. In his book, *Windows of the Soul*, author Ken Gire warns us... "we must be careful when the meal I'm preparing becomes more important than the people I'm preparing it for, when my work becomes more important than the family I'm working for." Yes, we've allowed the demands of this world to weigh us down and cause us to stumble. You know, God wants us to make a life that is meaningful and purposeful in this world, building stepping stones for ourselves and for others as we journey through it. Yet, at one time or another all of us have chased the wrongs things and the consequence is that there are probably some broken parts in our lives. And as we reflect, wishing we had made different choices and decisions, our ultimate yearning is to be made whole again. So what can we do?

Well, we heard the answer in today's Scripture. Jesus said, "Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light." You see, Jesus, the carpenter, knew the importance of a proper fitting yoke. In ancient times, yokes were customized to fit perfectly around the necks of each of the individual oxen so that when the two worked together, there was no pressure or pain on either one. They could work in perfect union, neither oxen feeling the load too heavy. And just imagine if you and our Lord Jesus worked like that! Imagine if you came to him with all those issues in your life and made him part of your decision-making. Imagine if, instead of trying to be in control of your life, you let Jesus lead you. Imagine if you really did walk side by side, yoked with Jesus Christ. Wouldn't your burdens feel lighter, wouldn't there be less pain, wouldn't you in fact, be more apt to make the right decisions? Well, the good news is that it's not too late to fix the problems, the stumbling blocks, the broken parts in your life. It's never too late.

And I'll tell you why. Because Jesus was, and still is, a working man. Remember, as a carpenter he was in the business of repairing things. I want to share a legend of Jesus by preacher Edwin McNeill Poteat. It was the time prior to his ministry, when Jesus spent dawn till dusk in the carpenter's shop. One day a shepherd came desperately to Jesus to have his crook repaired. You see, this particular crook represented this man's life. It was his father's, and before that his grandfather's. It was essential to his making a living and providing for his family. And now it was broken. Shattered in two. So he came to Jesus for help. And he watched as Jesus sawed away the broken ends, and smoothed them carefully with a file and then joined them expertly together with a dowel pin. Then he watched Jesus fill the split seam with wax and rub it vigorously until it was all but invisible. And then he watched as the master

craftsman took the crook and struck it hard against the ground. It vibrated with a solid and resilient sound, even stronger than when new. The shepherd was amazed and overjoyed. He told Jesus that he thought he would have to throw out the crook because it was broken and useless. To which the master and carpenter replied, "So often it's easier to give up than to repair something. If only they knew the joy of bringing back the beauty and strength of something that was once broken." The shepherd left the carpenter's shop not only with his beautifully restored crook, but with his spirit renewed.

So on this Labor Day, I want to remind you, Jesus Christ is still in the business of repair! So come to him all who are weary, and he will give you rest and wholeness. Amen.