

Whatever you do...

John Lovatt suggests that daily work is a high calling, and that the Creator is present with us as we create new things – intellectual as well as physical. He looks at toil and failure, and suggests we have a priestly role in offering them up to God. Finally, he recommends that we take frequent sabbaths, and are reassured that none of our work is a waste of time, but will be taken by Christ and restored to the glory he originally wanted for it when he creates the new heaven and the new earth.

And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him. (Colossians 3:17, NRSV)

We may not be aware, in our daily work, of the high calling we have.

Creation

In business, but also at home, we are daily creating new things, new ideas, new products, new solutions. Surely, it has to be that God the Creator is involved in those creations? In our Creed, we say 'through whom all things were made'. St. Teresa of Ávila said 'God has no hands but ours'. Jesus himself said, 'I am the vine... without me you can do nothing' (John 15:5, NKJV). Are

we co-creating with God? I prefer to think of my work as mine, with God surrounding me, ever present, ready to help when asked, rather than doing the work jointly. And yet, I am working with God's Creation, and ultimately it is his property not mine.

Paul asked us to 'pray without ceasing' (1 Thess 5:17, ESV) and I find it necessary to have that consciousness of the presence of God as I do my work, so that if it starts to go wrong, or I need inspiration, I can look at him and ask. Paul also said 'Rejoice always' (previous verse), so I need to rejoice as I create! Otherwise, that absence of God results for me in Satan coming in and telling me all sorts of lies about how useless my work is, and that all is vanity and

chasing the wind (Eccl 1:14, NRSV). But God is all around me, and experiences the joy of creation as new things happen.

But we have to work with a fallen Creation. When Adam and Eve were thrown out of Eden, the ground also was cursed (Gen 3:17). Stars die. Even the dinosaurs had arthritis. The minerals we work with all have natural impurities, making them unreliable unless purified. Our brothers and sisters the animals we work with have their troubles – disease attacks, they get old, and sometimes they are frustrated because they can't do the work. The whole creation is subjected to frustration, and in bondage to decay (Romans 8:20-21, NIV). As Jesus said, 'an enemy has done this' (Matt 13:28, ESV).

A dying star

Hubble image of NGC 5189.
Photo: NASA, ESA, and the Hubble
Heritage Team





Ransomware: The WannaCry attack on the NHS cost the service almost £100m. Photo: @fendifille/Twitter/PA

But Christ came to overcome death and disease, to release us from the captivities of frustration, and to bring heaven on earth. And he continues this work with us. He is sad when work that I do fails, but hopeful and rejoicing with me at signs of new life.

It is quite easy to see that our work with the physical Creation – gardening, manufacture, repair and servicing of machines, making our house clean and beautiful – is work in which God is present as the Creator. But what about intellectual work? Is God not present and rejoicing when I type out and set a page beautifully for him? If I create neat and beautiful accounts, a pleasure to behold, and easy and clear to understand, surely my God is near and rejoicing with me. If my computer software crashes and loses a lot of my data, is Jesus not there, suffering the loss of some of his creation?

But is God present when I am part of a company producing armaments? Or when I am creative in finding new ways to make ransomware (malicious software blocking access to data until a ransom is paid) indestructible? Unfortunately, I suppose he is. And suffering. I have heard that using God's creative powers for evil ends is a form of

blasphemy: disrespect, that is, for what is sacred. And yet, armaments can be produced – as many argue the nuclear deterrent has – to balance power, such that peace may continue. Ukraine is an example of such an imbalance. And the ransomware indestructibility system, once understood, can be used to make normal systems more stable. Like the blind man in John 9, the joy in restoring someone's data by cracking the ransomware code can outweigh the misery of losing it. But it is indeed difficult to imagine any good intention in producing ransomware.

Toil

However, a lot of the time we don't have the privilege of creating new things. We have to pursue our daily work with drudgery and soulless routine, persevering when perhaps we are ill, or tired, or even exhausted. And if anything can go wrong, it will. We hit all sorts of obstacles, and sometimes despair, perhaps calling on God to help, but no help seems to come. This is indeed the curse of Adam (Gen 3:17). Thorns and Thistles (Gen 3:18). We are thrown out of the Garden, God is distant. But we go on, out of pure love for God – pure, because it is not in return for anything

from God, he is absent. That pure love becomes a sacrifice, and sacrifice is redemptive. In some way, we become reconciled to God, and the creation we are ministering to also becomes reconciled, and we find ourselves close to God after all, feeling close to him in his suffering and reconciling of the world to God (Col 1:19).

Failure and frustration

But we do fight against evil also. In business particularly, there are forces of evil who make some people believe that it is right to defraud and exploit us because we are richer than they are, and they need to support a family, whereas we have more than enough. There are senior executives of companies who are ruthless in extending the power of their company to near monopoly status, so that they can increase their share value and pay themselves large bonuses. There are individuals who enjoy lording it over their employees, and in using deceit to profit from a customer's gullibility without being discovered. If you are employed by a company which is doing that, what do you do? If you speak the truth to power, you may well lose your job. Should you leave to work for a nice company, or

stay to try and change things? If so, the road may be long and hard, and you may fail. Frustration was there in Jesus' ministry: the disciples couldn't heal, even though he had asked them to (Matt 17:17); he overturned the tables of the exploitative moneychangers, which probably contributed to his death (Matt 21:12); the leaders of the day were blind to the realities of good leadership and to God's will (Matt 23 and Jn 9). We have no doubt similar experiences with our work, and as part of an organisation doing such things our hands are dirty. Peter called us all a royal priesthood (1 Peter 2:9), and some of our work, lay and ordained, is priestly in that we offer the sin not only of ourselves but also of our organisation up to God, and pray for the Holy Spirit to come and baptise us with fire, and for us to ask forgiveness, not only for ourselves, but the organisation also.

Reconciling the world to God

Part of our priestly ministry also is being with Christ reconciling the fallen Creation to God. Our understanding of Christ's work of suffering and salvation seems to have narrowed during the last 200 years, to focus exclusively on human guilt. Isaac Watts, John Wesley, and Martin Luther before them, had no hesitation in including all non-human creation in Christ's saving work.

The whole brute creation will then undoubtedly be restored, not only to the vigour, strength and swiftness they

had at their creation, but to a far higher degree of each than they ever enjoyed, as a recompense for what they once suffered; they shall enjoy happiness suited to their tastes, without alloy, without interruption, without end.

- John Wesley, on the death of a favourite horse

Be comforted, little dog, thou too at the resurrection shall have a golden tail.

- Martin Luther

He is the image of the invisible God; his is the primacy over all creation. In him everything in heaven and on earth was created, not only things visible but also the invisible orders of thrones, sovereignties, authorities and powers; the whole universe has been created through him and for him. He exists before all things, and all things are held together in him. (Col 1:15-17, REB)

For in him God in all his fullness chose to dwell, and through him to reconcile all things to himself, making peace through the shedding of his blood on the cross - all things, whether on earth or in heaven. (Col 1:19-20, REB).

If the whole universe was created through Christ and for him, surely this has to include our own creations? What we create is often inadequate, even faulty, sometimes due to our own fault but also sometimes just due to the nature of the work, such as variable raw materials: but as one part of the whole creation, Christ gathers up all these

failures onto the cross, and they become part of his work of reconciling all things to God. It is part of the fallen creation, taken up by Christ for reconciliation. It will be part of his new creation; nothing will be lost, except what must be lost (John 17:12) (but more of that later). We just need to commit the failures to God.

The need for a Sabbath

I need from time to time to stand back from my work, reflect on it, appreciate it and enjoy it. Otherwise, it just becomes a chore, an endless grind, and I lose sight of God. What I am actually doing is participating in the peace of the final act of creation: like God, I stand back and say, "that's good!", "the job's a good 'un". Our work is not complete without it. To me, this is a Sabbath, and the peace and rest of the Sabbath has an eternal quality now, and is a foretaste of the rest from labour in Heaven.

The Sabbath is surely a principle, rather than a day of the week, and a brief "sabbath" break during work (it need only be a few seconds) can be taken to contemplate what has just been finished, and reflect on it. Some people have a routine that when they get home from work they have five minutes peace, reflecting on the day, giving thanks for what is good. However, it can develop into worrying about the problems! Similarly, is Sunday (or Saturday?), an appropriate time to reflect in this way on our work - not worrying about it, but quietly reflecting on it, presenting it to



A sabbatical moment

Photo: Eton X

God, looking for the good in it, looking forward to the future glory of our work, when it will be transformed by Christ as the Lord of all creation, to be part of the heavenly city?

The Future Glory – a New Heaven, and a New Earth

And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away. And he that sat upon the throne said, Behold, I make all things new. And he said unto me, Write: for these words are true and faithful. (Rev 21:4, KJV)

"Behold, I will create new heavens and a new earth." (Is 65:17, KJV)

I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us. For the creation waits in eager expectation for the children of God to be revealed. For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the freedom and glory of the children of God. (Romans 8:18–21, NIV)

The Christian hope of the General Resurrection (that is, the resurrection in a new heaven and earth of the whole creation, human and non-human) results in a new attitude to what we create now. The important principle is that everything will be restored, healed, remade, to its full intended glory, and everything will make sense. This includes, again, all forms of creation – for example broken relationships will be healed. It is important because it means that none of our work is useless, a waste of time. God has it in his eternal plan.


When they had all had enough to eat, he said to his disciples, "Collect the pieces that are left over, so that nothing may be lost." (John 6:12, REB)

"While I was with them, I protected by the power of your name those whom you gave me. Not one of them is lost except the man who must be lost, for Scripture has to be fulfilled." (John 17:12, REB)

The things we make, the words we speak, are so often wasted (apparently), and worthless. The result is that much of our work seems depressingly pointless. These two bible passages show Jesus's passionate reassurance that even if we have forgotten or do not care, God cares and remembers everything we have made. Nothing will be lost.

But what sort of shape will our products and creations take?

We could speculate, but St. Paul drew his Corinthian readers' attention to the difference between a grain of wheat and the eventual wheat plant. You couldn't imagine the outcome. He stated that it was foolish to speculate on the exact type of our resurrected bodies (1 Cor 15:35). But all our creations, except those that must be lost, will be there, made perfect.

The hope of the General Resurrection makes us take the work we do daily more seriously. Everything we make or create will form part of the heavenly Jerusalem: it has an eternal destiny. We need to do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus. 

The technician's prayer

I present to you, my Lord, this part of your damaged creation.

You, who make all things, must be suffering to see this.

Send your Holy Spirit to inspire me and lead me into all truth, so that I quickly discover what is wrong with it.

Be with me as I repair it,

and guide my hands and my mind so that I don't make any serious mistakes.

In my kingly role, give me the power to do a good job quickly and responsibly.

And if I find shoddy work or deliberately planned poor quality, in my priestly role I offer up to you the sinfulness of our humanity, to be taken up into your cross, and ask you to have mercy on us, and heal our infirmities.

In my prophetic role, push me to protest about bad work, and help find ways to help people correct their systems.

And if this piece of your creation is beyond economic repair, and will be discarded, I commend it to your fatherly keeping, and ask that one day it will form part of that mysterious transformation which will be your new creation, when you make a new heaven and a new earth. So that nothing is lost.

Bless me, my tools, and my colleagues,

So that in all our work we glorify you

And give pleasure to those who were dismayed at the breakdown of this machine...

One God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit

Amen.



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