

The Big Picture: “Laboring For The Lord”

Bible Reading:

1 Peter 2:4-10

Matthew 6:10

Romans 12

Catechism Reading:

Q/A 123

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It's been quite a trip.

Not my vacation - though that was good, too.

I'm thinking about the trip that you brave people took, who were willing to gather here Sunday mornings this summer, and take time during worship to consider the whole issue of world view.

It's something, you see, that takes a bit of work to process.

You can't necessarily fit it into neat little boxes.

You can't give it a bit of attention, an hour or two every once in a while.

And you can't do it alone.

Brave folk you are, willing to take time to consider it.

Even braver to rehash it during the week.

And then - well, could you imagine..... trying to put it into practice?

Brave folk indeed.

Fool hardy, some might say..... some who haven't heeded the parting words of Christ:

"All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore....." (Mt 28)

Words that led the apostle John to declare that followers of Christ have victory guaranteed; that when it comes to battling false spirits and powers that move with abandon through our world, the victory is assured to believers because *"the One who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world."* (1 John 4:4)

We took time this summer to look at some of the "Big Picture" issues involved in being a Christian in today's world.

Beginning with a reminder that God's work began in Creation, and will end in the new Creation, re-Creation. It *isn't* our objective as believers to live escapist lives hoping for an eternal retreat in heaven.

Which led us to a consideration of what we look like, mirror, image. We are, in some respect, reflectors of God - like God, in God's image. We are here to do God's work on earth - care for, explore and develop the Creation as God's hands, eyes, and feet.

And we do that in full loyalty to the Lord of Creation. There are many forces, spirits and ideas that run unchecked and unchallenged. Many of them will quietly push the Lord from centre stage in our lives. He becomes, we said, just a sort of "bench wamer" in our lives. We misplace our loyalties.

Christians with a big picture view of things live out their full loyalty to the Lord well aware of the Fall into Sin and how we have been rescued by Jesus Christ. He life and redemption is the Centrepiece of the Bible's message. His great, victorious power over what *seems* like the great, unconquerable power of Satan. The renewal that comes into our lives through the Holy Spirit.

In that big picture, then, brave Christians who are willing to think these things through get to work. They don't try to isolate themselves from the world. They don't apply their faith to certain areas of life and write others off as of no consequence. They work for hope-filled change in all areas of life for Him who made all those areas and has rightful claim to ownership over them. They challenge rebellious and destructive spirits, social trends and institutions. They seek to bring healing into broken lives, hope to communities and correct service into social structures.

All for Jesus' sake.

And do you know, brave Christians, what believers are doing when they live with eyes wide open?

When they live aware and responsive to the Big Picture?

They are, in every thought, breath and action, living out that part of the Lord's prayer which says - *"Thy Kingdom come."* (Matthew 6:10)

That's what our catechism tells us in question and answer 123:

Q: What does the second request mean?

A: *Your kingdom come* means,

Rule us by your Word and Spirit in such a way that more and more we submit to you.

Keep your church strong and add to it.

Destroy the devil's work;
Destroy every force which revolts against you and every conspiracy against your Word.
Do this until your kingdom is so complete and perfect
that in it you are
all in all.

They are acting out the plea of Romans 12:

"Therefore, I urge you, fellow believers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God - this is your spiritual act of worship. Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is - His good, pleasing and perfect will."

They work to overcome the evil so prevalent in creation with the good that comes from the Lord.

They are living as those peculiar people of light, the holy nation that battles darkness and seeks in all ways, all times, all aspects of living on earth, to give praise to God. The stuff that 1 Peter 2 talked about.

Peculiar, obedient, brave followers of Christ.

That's the challenge to which we are called..... if we're serious about the Big Picture that stares at us as Christians.

I'd like to take a few moments on this Labour Day weekend to put the wraps to this exercise of exploration by laying out four observations, observations that Richard Middleton and Brian Walsh present in their excellent worldview book, *The Transforming Vision*. Well worth your time to read it.

I want to challenge each of you brave enough to consider the matter of living a life that is, in the Big Picture, through and through Christian -

I want to say that we need to:

- renounce our idols
- recognize how interconnected the parts of life are
- acknowledge and submit to God's norms in Creation
- live as a renewed communal bent on obedience to Jesus

We need to do these things if we are truly serious about Christian living.

Can we do that?

Can we renounce our idols?

Means asking some tough questions about where we have our **real** priorities. When push comes to shove, what do we really count on to make life work, go well, move in the right direction?

Come to think of it.....What, for us, counts as living in the right direction?

The power of human ability to think things through and solve problems.

The power of technology.

The importance of economic progress, of growing national and personal wealth.

The preeminence of personal rights and freedoms; doing it "my way."

None of these issues, in the right place and amount and time, is wrong all by itself. Trouble is - our society has put these on a very high pedestal. Perhaps a pedestal that looks an awful lot like those on which ancient idols were perched. We depend on these ideas. Wrap our lives around these ideas. Buy right into them.

Are we willing to examine them?

Are we willing to have someone else - an elder or pastor, a fellow believer, a member of our family - take a look into our lives and challenge us about some of our priorities and assumptions?

It's a brave person willing to check their own basic assumptions and values in life.

Can we do that?

Can we recognize, secondly, how interconnected the parts of life are?

Remember what we said - service to the Lord can't be fit in nice, neat little yellow boxes that are brought down off the shelf for certain moments and days. Creation, as God made it, is far too complex and far too interconnected for that.

What we do in one area, what we say and believe, has impact on many others, too. Pull on one corner of a spider's web and the whole thing shifts. Vibrate one strand and the whole thing shakes.

Creation is a God-designed web.

So, brave believer, when on Labour Day the idea of work enters our mind - can we look beyond employees as being value-adders to the bottom line for share holders? What about the emotional, social and psychic elements there? What about the need for responsibility as creative stewards? Does it mean that when you retire your worth as a God-imager disappears?

And, if you dare, what about industrial progress? Is the economic bottom line the only factor? What about ecological care for God's maple trees and ocean bottoms? Would brave Christians challenge their employers..... and be willing to help shoulder the burden by recognizing that ecological care may require not only reduced profits, but perhaps reduced wages?

Or the fact that my retirement portfolio is growing because of foreign profits from firms in places where funds help prop up regimes which oppress..... dare we ask questions about this?

Or about how much effort we as a nation need to expend, and how many dollars we need to invest into places of the world which we may never see, that have names we could never pronounce, and where national interests may never be forwarded..... but where children go to war, or where fellow image bearers languish in refugee camps.

Where issues of the right to live challenge not only aboriginals, but social welfare structures that lock single parents in dead-end subsistence.

This goes far beyond just showing up for Church School classes, singing one's favourite hymns at full volume, tithing regularly, and doing faithful devotions every night - important as those areas all may be.

Can we do that?

Can we, in the third place, acknowledge and submit to God's norms in Creation?

Canadian society today places right at the top of the heap, as ultimate value, the individual's right to freedom and happiness. More than anything else, that comes first. Everything else must march to that pounding drum beat. Right? What keeps getting cited in court case after court case? Charter of..... **rights and freedoms**.

Everything else is negotiable, we're told.

Brave Christians are willing to challenge that.

They're willing to publically proclaim that the Creator has laws and norms built right into the warp of society.

Creation is **not** made to sustain dumping of toxic waste with full abandon. Sexuality was not made to be a romp in the park with partner after partner. Economics was not created as a sphere of life for ever-greater grabbing and growth, every person for themselves.

No, Virginia, it's **NOT** a "*whatever*" situation - whatever you want, and whatever doesn't infringe on others, that goes.

God's Word gives clear calls about the care for creation; chastity for all; safe space in life for the voiceless and weak.

God has built norms right into Creation. Big Picture believers see them. Submit to them. And work to bring all of life into increasing line with them. They pray for the Spirit's power to make them effective. They pray for the power of Christ's cross to bring new beginnings. Because they know that the nation and culture that continues to snub God's norms will eventually be judged. It will be brought to ruin.

Big picture Christians can't help but wonder just how close to the edge Canadian culture is slipping.

Can we do that?

Can we, fourth and finally, live as a renewed covenant community bent on obedience to Jesus?

Because, you see, no one believer can do all this. No one believer can ask all the right questions, see all the pitfalls, hear all the Spirit's whisperings, keep a full and clear eye on the cross, challenge the social powers and principalities, and offer Christ-redeemed alternatives.

No one believer can do this alone.
Ever.

And **THAT** is probably the hardest thing for us to hear..... and do.

The sin and the idol of individual rights and freedoms; that great stronghold of Satan has taken deep hold of Canada, my friends. And it has sunk its talons far deeper into the soul of the Church than we care to admit.

Where do we see it?

Little hints show:

- when we drop in and out of church life depending on whether we like the tune of the moment or the topic du jour..... and that happens here at Calvin every single week.
- when we refuse to submit our lives to the scrutiny of fellow believers and those ordained by God as spiritual leaders..... an ongoing reality in this congregation.
- when we ferment and lobby for one course of action or another and won't let it go because we happen to find it most comfortable..... we've all done it, haven't we?
- we don't give a hand, we don't spare the change, we don't open the door..... because we're so terribly busy or feel too tired or it's just not very convenient right now.

Question -- What can you do as **one** brave, big picture Christian do in the name of Jesus?

Answer - Absolutely nothing.

By yourself..... **absolutely nothing!!**

Because Jesus **never** meant labour for the Lord to be done alone.

Overcoming evil with good will never happen by yourself.

Church worship is something we are called to do together. With all the energy we can muster.

Oh, that the brave people of God, redeemed by Jesus to new ways of living, would expend as much concern and energy in asking questions and providing hope and encouragement to each other about worship in the workplace, classroom and playground.....

..... Romans 12.1 kind of worship.....

standing shoulder to shoulder in seeking new, hope-filled ways of Godly living, supporting each other with time, tears and dollars, challenging and risking.....

as much expended in all of life living

as they do in arguing and debating about forms of liturgy and colours of hymn books for Sunday morning worship.

Can we do it?

Will it be to us that the Judge of Creation will say, "*Well done, good and faithful servant!*"???