

Polly's Pondering

"Let all that you do be done in love." 1 Corinthians 16:14

I was a young leader in the church, responsible for Christian Education from our very youngest to our very oldest. I began leading a Bible study in my home on Paul's Letter to the Philippians. It was all women and one man. It would be around ten years later that I would understand the importance of that Bible Study from his perspective.

He participated and shared and laughed and pondered right along with the rest of us. We knew that he had lost his job, otherwise he would not have been able to participate in the daytime Bible study. What we did not know at the time is that the loss of job had made him question his self-worth and had thrown him into a deep depression that no one outside of his wife was privy to at the time.

Rev. Dr. Susan Brooks-Thislethwaite wrote in a 2009 article that "Work, whether a paid job or unpaid work in the home as a caregiver, or in a volunteer capacity, is fundamental to human nature and its expression." Rev. Brooks-Thislethwaite went on to say that it is through work that human beings share "in the activity of the Creator." My student, I suspect at the time, would have agreed with this statement.

Saint Teresa Avila, a Spanish noblewoman who chose a frugal life in the Catholic Church in order to serve Jesus, would most likely respond to Rev. Brooks-Thislethwaite with her quote "Our Lord does not care so much for the importance of our works as for the love with which they are done." It is, I believe, not when we do works that we are most fully human, but rather when we are loving that we are most human and most participatory in the activities of the Creator. Yes, we were designed for work and sent out to work, but if we work absent of loving we will find our sense of worth - hollow. We might achieve everything and gain nothing. We might be lauded as reaching the highest level of human achievement to find its rewards are empty promises.

Upon reflection of Paul's letter, John Wesley wrote "It is not possible in the nature of things that a [person] should be happy who is not holy." Paul puts it this way in Philippians 3: 7-8

'Yet whatever gains I had; these I have come to regard as loss because of Christ. More than that, I regard everything as loss because of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord...'

So, if today you are struggling with self-worth – for whatever reason – hear these steps from Paul

1. "Rejoice in the Lord always..." (Find joy in the Lord, who loves you, created you, and saved you.)
2. "Let your gentleness be known to everyone..." (Put away anger and practice kindness.)
3. "The Lord is near..." (Even when he feels far away and you wonder if he is seeing your need.)
4. "Do not worry about anything..." (Simply share your needs with God in prayer.)
5. "The peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus..." (Your spiritual life with Christ will protect you during this time of struggle.)
6. "Finally, beloved, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things..." (The things you focus on will shape your own sense of worth, so be careful.)
7. "Keep on doing the things that..." (Or as he said in 1 Corinthians 16:14; "Let all that you do be done in love.")

So, go out this day and push the limits of your love. Participate in acts of kindness. Think about honorable things. Lovingly do all that you do in work or play as if onto the Lord, who is the fullest expression of God's love. And find your worth in Christ. And know this, "I AM CONFIDENT OF THIS, THAT THE ONE WHO BEGAN A GOOD WORK AMONG YOU WILL BRING IT TO COMPLETION BY THE DAY OF JESUS CHRIST." Philippians 1:6