

Workplace Faith

by Rubel Shelly

One day as Jesus was walking along the shore beside the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers — Simon, also called Peter, and Andrew — fishing with a net, for they were commercial fishermen. Jesus called out to them, "Come, be my disciples, and I will show you how to fish for people!" And they left their nets at once and went with him. A little farther up the shore he saw two other brothers, James and John, sitting in a boat with their father, Zebedee, mending their nets. And he called them to come, too. They immediately followed him, leaving the boat and their father behind. (Matthew 4:18-22 NLT)

When God became flesh as Jesus of Nazareth, He wasn't born to a family of priests. He didn't come as "clergy." He didn't have reserved parking near the door of a church building. He was born to a working-class family. He grew up learning a practical trade. And the teaching stories He later used came from the workplace of His day — fishing, construction, farming, accounting, and the like.

Then, when He was ready to expand His work, He didn't choose a single clergyman to be part of the group. He chose people who ranged from four men who were partners in a fishing business to an IRS agent.

So where did we ever get the idea that the heart of the work of God in the world today rests with Bible scholars and preachers? That the church is mainly a place for people to go, sit, observe, and critique professional religionists? For that matter, that church is a "place" at all? Or that anybody can be a "professional" at religion? If those ideas are right, wouldn't Jesus have done things differently?

Since about the fourth century, church has been place more than people and Christianity more cultural movement than way of life. Evangelism has been a strategy of inviting people to come where we are and worship a cluster of activity that tends either to confuse or to tire the uninitiated who occasionally do show up. There is a better way that looks more like Jesus' original method.

Christians are people whose love for and faith in Jesus Christ have moved them to become apprentices to Him and His way of reading the world, to begin imitating His love for His Father and His commitment to making life better for human beings of whatever background or lifestyle. Their strategy is not to isolate from others but to know, befriend, and affirm their dignity. The plan is not to permit those people to come where they are but to go among them; the leaven.

God must be weary of us Christians who see our task as railing against and alienating people who don't know Him! By that strategy, we give non-Christians a wrong impression of God. If we let Jesus define our terms and be the example for our lives, though; we would be befriending and protecting people. Enhancing and "flavoring" life. Receiving and including the world's marginal people.

The arena where all these things are best and most naturally done is the workplace. It is the most neglected mission field of all! But what if you were to go to work every day as a missionary whose task it is to represent Jesus? I think you would be surprised at the results.

Sunday meetings are not always the best index to your faith. Your workplace is. That's where your faith is tested daily.

Work hard and cheerfully at whatever you do, as though you were working for the Lord rather than for people. Remember that the Lord will give you an inheritance as your reward,



and the Master you are serving is Christ. (Colossians 3:23-24 NLT)