

Let us pray... God of wonder, you are holy. Create a space for holiness in our lives. Usher your Spirit in our midst. Inspire and transform us. May we find compassion, and may we share your truth and grace... Amen.

Labor Day weekend is here... A last hurrah of summer for many... A time that signifies a change in the season, and for some, getting back into a routine...

But Labor Day is also a time to reflect why we labor and what we are laboring for... As well as, setting aside time for sabbath...

Both of which, fits into our theology as Christians...

Right from the beginning of Scripture, in the book of Genesis, we are told that God rested on the seventh day...

And later in the Old Testament, God gives us the commandment, to remember the Sabbath and keep it holy...

Because having sabbath is important to God...

As sabbath refreshes and recenters us, so that our labor can be done in God's name.

Because no matter what you do or how you labor, you can find ways to share God's goodness, by being good stewards.

And stewardship is also in the creation story from Genesis, as God created humans to be stewards of God's creation...

Through stewardship we can reframe our mindset... Changing the question ... what do I get from this labor... to... how can I be a better steward for myself, for my neighbor, for creation, and for God...

And today Jesus challenges us a step further... Highlighting a kind of labor that lasts throughout our lives and does not require a job...

The labor of picking up ones cross and following Jesus.

Which from our gospel today sounds quite disturbing, as Jesus says he must “undergo great suffering at the hands of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised.”

But because Jesus has already done this for us... Our cross to bear is a little different...

Because of Jesus, the cross is no longer just about death... It is also about life...

Because what came out of the mystery of the cross was a new creation...

Where the cross has been transformed and is rooted in Christ’s compassion.

But this doesn’t mean it is going to be easy for us.

So, what does it mean to pick up our cross and follow Jesus?

If you go poking around in society, you will find a lot of differing opinions.

Some say it requires suffering, or a tragic death, some use it to glorify pain, some say we must submit to injustice, or remain in abusive situations, to give in and say, this is my cross to bear...

But those situations, the difficult, traumatizing, and horrific things that happen in life are not given to us by God...

Unfortunately, those things happen... They are horrible... They may wear us down, and they may change us... And as much as I wish they were not; they are a part of life...

But God does not give us those things as a cross to bear... Because the forsakenness, trauma, and death were Christ’s cross to bear...

He endured all of the horrific things we go through... So that we are never alone...

So that God is with us in all things.

Transforming the cross by rooting it in Christ's compassion...

As Christ poured out compassion, even as he was led to the cross...

Christ never dehumanized anyone, even as they crucified him...

Instead, he saw their full humanity, he loved them, and he even asked for their forgiveness...

And this is the very difficult cross we are called to carry.

We are called to carry the cross of compassion, by looking toward others instead of our personal agendas.

And one of the best definitions of what this means happens to be in our reading from Romans...

"Let love be genuine; hate what is evil, hold fast to what is good; love one another with mutual affection; outdo one another in showing honor. Be patient... Persevere in prayer... Extend hospitality to strangers. Bless those who persecute you; do not curse them. Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep. Live in harmony with one another; do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly; do not claim to be wiser than you are. Do not repay anyone evil for evil... Live peaceably with all."

A beautiful passage, but not so easy to put into action... As the cross is never the easy way out.

It is not easy to love in the radical way that God does...

It is not easy because it involves sacrifice and labor.

It is not easy because we are human and we will fall short.

But still, we are called to carry our cross and follow Jesus.

And so, on this Labor Day weekend, may you remember what you are called to labor for...

You are called to labor as good stewards of God's creation...

You are called to labor through compassion and love...

Compassion and love that you also, have received... Because you too deserve compassion and love...

Which means carrying your cross also involves being on the receiving end... By embracing God's compassion and love for you...

By remembering to take time for sabbath...

Where the Spirit can work in you... Bringing you rest... Allowing you to be recharged, refocused, and renewed...

Because your labor is not to be done in vain, but is to be rooted in God's love, and in the compassionate cross of Christ... Amen.