

Wesley United Methodist Church

November 17, 2013

"Busybodies."

2 Thessalonians 3:6-18

Someone visited an office and saw these signs hanging on the wall:

"Work fascinates me," said one, "I can sit and watch it for hours!"

"I don't mind going to work," said another. "But that 8-hour wait to go home is awful!"

"Hard work may not kill me," another said, "but why take a chance?"

People have all kinds of attitudes about their work. Anyone can do any amount of work provided it isn't the work he is supposed to be doing at that moment. That one may hit close to home.

On my daily calendar, it said, "A perfect summer day is when the sun is shining, the breeze is blowing, the birds are singing and the lawn mower is broken."

Someone else has said, "The worst day of fishing is better than the best day of working."

However, most of us can relate to the bumper sticker that says: "I owe, I owe, so off to work I go."

St. Paul had difficulty with the church at Thessalonica. Some of the members were refusing to do their share of the work. He writes, "In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, we command you, brothers and sisters, to keep away from every believer who is idle and disruptive and does not live according to the teaching you received from us. For you yourselves know how you ought to follow our example. We were not idle when we were with you, nor did we eat anyone's food without paying for it. On the contrary, we worked night and day, laboring and toiling so that we would not be a burden to any of you. We did this, not because we do not have the right to such help, but in order to offer ourselves as a model for you to imitate. For even when we were with you, we gave you this rule: 'The one who is unwilling to work shall not eat.'

"We hear that some among you are idle and disruptive. They are not busy; they are busybodies. Such people we command and urge in the Lord Jesus Christ to settle down and earn the food they eat. And as for you, brothers and sisters, never tire of doing what is good."

What do you do with people who refuse to do their share of the work? It's true in every organization. Some people do not do their share. Indira Gandhi once said, "There are two kinds of people, those who do the work and those who take the credit. Try to be in the first group--there is less competition."

Did you realize, by the way, that among rich countries people in the United States work the longest hours? Americans work much longer than Europeans, for example. This difference is quite surprising because productivity per hour worked is the same in the United States as it is in France and Germany, and it is growing at a similar rate.

In most countries and at most times in history, however, as people have become richer they have chosen to work less. In other words they decided to "spend" a part of their extra potential income on a fuller private life, not in the United States. We seem to choose acquiring more things as opposed to having more leisure. It's an interesting difference in attitude. Still, even with this American work ethic, there are many people who avoid doing their share.

Paul had that difficulty in the church at Thessalonica. Some people were faithful at work serving Christ, and others were not. Oh, this group had many good excuses. Some of them looked down on plain everyday work because of their upbringing. Some of those from Jewish backgrounds, for example, believed in hard work . . . but they believed that spiritual work was superior to physical work. They believed that only those who studied Scripture like the scribes were doing really worthy work, but not those who did manual labor. Some of those from Greek backgrounds didn't like to work, either . . . they felt it demeaning, and left most of their work to their slaves and servants. And then there were some from the Thessalonian congregation who believed work was no longer necessary because Jesus was going to return any moment.

They had many excuses for not working . . . like many people today. It is amazing how creative people can be in making excuses.

Abraham Lincoln was asked once about the size of the Confederate army. Lincoln said, "The Confederates have 1.2 million men."

One of his aides politely expressed doubt about that figure, so Lincoln said, "They have 1.2 million, there's no doubt. You see, all generals when they get whipped say the enemy outnumber them at least three to one. We have 400,000 men, so the Confederates must have 1.2 million."

Lincoln knew that it is part of human nature to make excuses when our performance is not up to par.

It is said that during World War II, the allied leaders Roosevelt, Stalin, and Churchill met for discussions of strategy and negotiation. In some of these meetings, Stalin would not approve of some strategy that Roosevelt and Churchill had planned out. When they asked why, Stalin would give some answer or another. Each time they would say, "That is no reason for you to refuse!"

Finally, Stalin told the two men a story about two Arabs. One Arab man asked his friend if he could borrow a rope. His friend said that he was unable to lend him his rope because he needed it to tie up his camel. The would-be borrower retorted, "But, friend, you told me that you do not own a camel." His friend answered, "Yes I know. But if I don't want to lend you my rope, then one excuse is as good as another."

The members of the church at Thessalonica had many good excuses. Churches are a living testimony to Pareto's principle that 20% of people do 80% of the work. It's human nature. Some of you are among that 20% that is responsible for the 80% of the work in this church. I am grateful for you. We could not make it without you.

Do you know what the worst sin is for Christians? It is not adultery. It is not murder. It is not some sort of sexual perversion. God tells us in Revelation 3. It's 'lukewarmness.' No passion. These people have the attitude that "God is just one of the things in my life. I have my social life and my career life and my sexual life and my family life and over here is a little piece of the pie called church. God says, 'How dare you! I love you this much. I love you passionately. I made you, created you, planned you, purposed you, saved you, have a place for you in heaven, and you would treat that with half-hearted indifference saying, Excuse me but there's a good TV show on tonight.'

Jesus says, "I'd rather have you hot or cold. Lukewarmness makes me sick to my stomach."

Certain members of the church at Thessalonica, like any church, were guilty of "lukewarmness." They were refusing to carry their share of the burden of the mission of the church.

Even worse, some of these lukewarm Christians brought a negative spirit into the fellowship. They were not only idle, but they criticized those who did work. Paul called these negative idlers, busybodies. And Paul had little use for these people. They did more harm than good. They had time on their hands and gossip on their lips . . . Have you ever known anyone like that?

Busybodies flit from house to house, taking little drops of gossip with them and leaving behind their own residue of irritating pollen. There's a vast difference between putting your nose in other people's business and putting your heart into their problems. I like that way of putting it. Busybodies.

An unknown author said he met the strangest man on his way to church. Here is how he described this man:

"He said he believed in the Bible, but he never reads it.

"He said he thought well of the church of which he is a member, but he never attends or invites others to share in its ministry.

"He said a person should be honest with God in money matters, but he never tithes.

"He said the younger generation needs the Lord, but he isn't leading them in that direction.

"He said the church needs dedicated Christian members, but he isn't one.

"He offered some 'constructive' criticism of some of the workers--but he never works.

"He said the church should do more in ministering to people, but he doesn't help.

"He is critical of the way the church is 'run,' but he never participates.

"He says he believes in the Second Coming, but he lives as though the Lord will never return.

"He says prayer will change things, but he never prays.

"He was," says this author, "a strange man, indeed!"

Paul called such people busybodies. They are busy, but not with constructive behavior. What we tend to overlook is this: the mind is *always active*; it is never still. It is either thinking positive thoughts or negative thoughts. A person may have an idle body, but not an idle mind. An idle brain is the devil's playground, as the old expression goes. This is the reason why so many idle persons--regardless of their age--get into trouble. The trouble can range all the way from becoming a busybody to murder. It is dangerous business to be idle.

Too many believers at Thessalonica had become idle busybodies, that is, poking themselves into other people's affairs, tattling, gossiping, and spreading all kinds of talk and rumors. Why? Because it is easier to be a busybody than it is to minister to the needs of those within the community who are hurting, lonely, desperate, dying, and lost.

Some of you are familiar with a little book that came out several years ago called *Life's Little Instruction Book*. It was compiled by H. Jackson Brown, Jr. As his son was packing for his freshman year in college, Brown retreated to the family room and wrote down 511 observations and words of counsel for his son. The result was *Life's Little Instruction Book: 511 Suggestions, Observations, and Reminders on How to Live a Happy and Rewarding Life*. Among his suggestions was no. 115: "Give yourself a year and read the Bible cover to cover." Here are some others: "Compliment three people everyday . . . Have a dog . . . Stop blaming others . . . Eat prunes . . . Lend only those books you never care to see again . . ." Here's an interesting one: "Avoid any church that has cushions on the pews." But there are more: "Spend less time worrying who's right, and more time deciding what is right . . . Keep secrets . . . Remember that all news is biased . . . Just to see how it feels, for the next 24 hours refrain from criticizing anybody for anything . . . Don't use time or words carelessly. Neither can be retrieved . . . Don't gossip." That's good advice for all of us, but especially for anyone tempted to be a busybody.

Of course, the strongest argument against being idle or being a busybody is that we have a world to save in Jesus' name. Look all about you at the people who need Christ. The lonely teenager, the shut-in, the single Mom struggling to keep her family afloat, the angry man with hate in his heart, the depressed woman looking for love in the wrong man's arms, the children who are never exposed to God or Jesus except in a curse. Tell me that you have nothing to do except criticizing those who are trying to make a difference. Tell me that you are a follower of Jesus but that these people don't matter. If you make a constructive difference in people's lives, you won't have time to be a busybody.

Dr. Tom Long tells about a friend of his who was telling him about taking a church youth group on a mission trip to Jamaica. "On their trip they visited one of the local elementary schools, and they spent some time observing in a classroom seriously overcrowded with children, most of them very poor, all of them needy and wiggly and noisy and unruly. It was a difficult, sometimes even chaotic, learning environment; but the youth group marveled to see that the teacher carried herself with great calm and patience, treating all of the children with love and respect, despite the poverty and the chaos. They decided that the only way she could do this was that she must really love being a teacher. But they were surprised to hear her say, 'Oh, I don't come here every day mainly because I love teaching. I come here every day because I love Jesus, and I see Jesus in every one of these children.'"

That saint of God will never be idle, never be a busybody. She'll never be among the 80% who want a free ride in the church. She loves Jesus. That says it all.