

I don't like Mondays

David Josey, 23 November 2008

Daniel 1:1-20

Opening prayer

Lord Jesus, are looking at how we should view work and what you want us to do when we work. Help us to ask the right questions of you and show us, please, your answers.

Introduction

I hate Mondays! What is wrong with Mondays I asked Ian when he gave me this title? 'Well,' he said, looking perplexed at my question, 'Mondays is the start of the working week and some people hate being at work. It is a pessimistic statement.' If want to be pessimistic, I said, Fridays are even worse - they are much too close to Mondays!

That is pretty awful, when you cannot enjoy two days off work, when you can't relax and do your own thing, because of what you have to do in the near future! Or maybe, your work does not actually have a weekend break in it. Maybe you are on-call for failures and they just keep coming in by the hour. I know of plumbers who switch off their mobiles because they have been overwhelmed by the calls for immediate help. Or a mother that has a sick child that demands their continuous attention. I am sure that many of us have been there - maybe we all have at sometime in our lives. Maybe you are there at this minute - you have come to church for a bit of peace and the preacher is not letting you get away for a few minutes. Why will he not just shut up?

I want to tell you now, that God loves you. He has compassion for you. Remember when Jesus cried? He cries for you now! If you are not under stress this morning, I also want you to know that God loves you too!

Previous two weeks

This is the third in a mini-series on 'work.' The first week Ian said that "work might be defined as the activities you are principally engaged in during the week, whether in or out of the home, 'employed' or 'unemployed'."

Work, then is broadly about life and is the norm - God ordained.

Psalm 111:2, "Great are the works of the LORD; they are pondered by all who delight in them."

The conclusion is that:

1. work is good

1. work is our service of God

1. work is our ministry for God.

Last week Gordon looked at how we act as Christians at work, and in particular how we can minister at work.

Gordon reminded us that we are children of God - so we can never be an *only this* or an *only that*.

We looked at the story of Naaman, a commander of a great and victorious army, greatly thought of by his king. **But he had leprosy.** A slave girl, taken by force to serve his family, showed him how to cure himself. A brave and courageous action for a lowly person - that was her ministry. Gordon suggests we do three things in our work:

- a.. **Observe** what is happening to people around you

- b. Have **Compassion** for those people struggling with problems.

- c. Have confidence that God is with you, so that you can **ACT**.

This week

In our bible reading, we hear how Daniel, simply followed God's teaching and his employer accepted this and every thing in the garden was roses. Simple! We just do the same and all will be well! End of sermon!

I guess I could tell my work story of similar successes and how there never really was any problems. Would you believe me? I hope not!

What are our problems, AND, how can we deal with them? I am going to relate a few of the challenges, or problems, that I have faced. Some of them may apply to you.

Firstly though, it is important that we understand where we come from and where each of us is at. In my case I was a railway signal engineer working for a large national company - British Rail. It was largely a male workplace, my department had regional offices of 250 - 300 people, and there were clearly defined conditions of service and an active union culture. For over two thirds of my time I was in the management grades, rising through the grades, though I never attained executive rank.

The other important point is that I did not start out as a Christian. I went to Sunday school as a child, but had left in my teens. There was still a residue of Christian teaching in me as there was in the general culture of the time. But apart from saying the Lord's prayer in times of trouble I did not have a faith and teachings to rely on. I came back to the church in my thirties and slowly gained in knowledge and faith, but applying this to my life at work took a very long time - AND it's still going on! Perhaps you are in a similar position.

A couple of the more difficult problems I have had to deal and I guess, apply to everyone here to different extents.

A. In my work there were the technical and engineering judgements that we made. Even though there were checks, mistakes were still made. How to report them, how to deal with them, how do you put things right? Being honest I guess is the only option long term option.

Whether we are signal engineers or not, we all have to make decisions on what to buy and on not what to buy. Sometimes the decision is wrong. Sometimes it is us who did not ask the right question or think through what we wanted. Then we need to put up our hand and accept it was us and not look to blame others. Sometimes though it is not our fault. How do you deal with that? A good way is ask yourselves *what would Jesus do?* {WWJD?

B. Disciplinary problems! How do you deal with people get it wrong? Sometimes it is easy to know what to do, even if it is unpleasant doing it. One case I had was a person who had seriously, and over a long period, misused their travel privileges? Fairly easy this one, in that it was a sackable offence, and a manager had no real option but to sack the person. The challenge here was to punish the crime but not be dismissive of the person. Loosing their job was bad enough without me being unpleasant! People under performing in their job is often much more difficult and employment law requires a period of stick and carrot to try to improve the person's performance. It may be that a move to another job might be the answer - if one is available and all parties agree.

Dealing with the problem sensibly, with a focus on the issues, and having an appropriate level of compassion, or understanding, or tolerance for the person involved is a major challenge.

Fortunately for me when I had to deal with such issues, I had already had a lot of Christian teaching on which to call. Latterly I also had a Spiritual Director who I would see every three or four months. An 80+ year old American nun who I could talk to about an engineering manager who never delivered on time, never to spec. and who was always over budget! Mary-Ann had no idea what a railway signal was, but she did know and love Jesus. She had been a Mother Superior and ran a convent; she had been the secretary to the Mother General, had worked in the Vatican and had travelled the world. She had **Observed** much in the world both inside and outside of the church. She had much **Compassion** for the world and its peoples, based on her love of Jesus. She knew her bible and, after prayer and meditation and discussion, she had the confidence to **Act**, or with me, to give advice. WWJD was her watchword.

You might well be saying, I am not a railway signal engineer, I am not a manager etc. etc. so I do not have disciplinary problems to deal with. Maybe so, but we can all meet people who are rude, or who do not do their work well, that affects us. How do we respond to them? Observe, compassion - and then check it against WWJD - act.

Sounds simple! For a doer like me it can sometimes be Act, Compassion, Observe, WWJD!

Getting the right order is a challenge to people like me, particularly when things happen quickly.

So what speaks to me when I am under pressure? What is the one thing that I focus on. It is in the name of Jesus. Jesus is called the Prince of Peace. Well that is the translation into English. The Hebrew word is *Shalom*. It is just not peace, not something nice and quiet, keeping out of mainstream life. Did Jesus keep his head down in quiet surroundings? Of course not. He went into the capital - Jerusalem. He went into the Temple and drove out those that denigrated it. Hardly quiet!

Shalom includes Peace, but it also encompasses Justice and it encompasses Righteousness - or rightness with God.

Justice and being right - under God - is something that just wells up in me. Peace is rather more difficult!

But enough of me, let us look at someone else. Someone who had lovely plans, whose family and friends thought the plans were good and who helped to make them come true. Plans that peoples have always had. Isabel please come and share with us.

Just for the record we are married and this is about our early days.

David. Isabel, you were happily married, had a lovely home and a wonderful job, and a gorgeous young husband.

Isabel. Yes! But we had no money to spare and we had to be very careful with our pennies.

David. Where was Jesus in our lives?

Isabel. Well! We went to church every week.

David. Then what happened?

Isabel. We decided to move to a larger house and then to have a baby.

David. {Did it happen?

Isabel. Sort of, but not quite in the order we planned it. There was a lull in the market and it took 9 months to sell and move. By then I was expecting so I had to drive up the motorway to work until I could leave work - I got very tired.

David. Then you had the baby and all was well!

Isabel. No! There were problems in the hospital which were not sorted until after I had left there, so I suffered poor medical help. William was very demanding, I did not know what to do and my friends were working. Before motherhood I had always solved my problems by working harder or longer. Now that method simply did not work for me.

David. But you did have wonderful husband!

Isabel. Erh! Not exactly! He worked long hours and came home tired. Sometimes he was called out in the middle of the night.

David. But the church was there for you?

Isabel. We had only just moved and we knew no one there. I was very lonely, we had no neighbours then. Lychpit was mostly then fields, there were very few houses. Later on Lesley Mills was very kind and used to visit me.

David. Didn't we find some nuns and a mother/baby group that were good?

Isabel. That was later when the William was a toddler. Yes, they were good for me but that was a year or so after William was born.

David. But you had your faith to support you?

Isabel. Not really, I was still a young Christian and did not really understand what being a Christian meant. It was sometime later that I really tried to let Jesus into my life and to realise how much he, God, loved me.

Despite all this - a person was sent to rescue me - a man who was lodging with one of our two neighbours knocked on the door and realised that I had been crying. He worked voluntarily for the Samaritans and insisted I started to get help. This led to you realising there was a serious problem and so we went to the nun's for help and they suggested the mother/toddler group across town.

David. You said you really tried to let Jesus into your life.

Really tried! Try harder! Sounds like a mantra!

Isabel. All my life I have tried to do things properly - perfectly. I have worked hard to achieve that. But it does not always work for me. Allowing Jesus into my life has allowed me to try and help people and to stand alongside. He has allowed me to enjoy a basic job of teaching children read and write - to enjoy them. To allow them to be who they are and know we are all valued because God loves us.

We don't have to be successful in monetary terms or ambitious in our jobs except to know that what we are doing is what God wants us to do. We must always try to use the gifts we have for the good of others. There are many problems around us in the world, but basically I feel at peace because I know that God is in control.

Thank you Isabel.

So for Isabel the emphasis is on God's love. For me the emphasis is on the justice of God. Two sides of the same coin really. Each of us have our own characters BUT, each of us is a child of God. Just as each of you is a child of God.

Walking in the footsteps of Daniel will not always be easy. It will not always work out as it did for Daniel. What are the basic steps?

Pray

Read the bible - seek out sound teaching.

If there is one thing I want you to remember each Monday morning it is God loves us and is with us always. We need to try to act so that our Father in heaven will be pleased with us - knowing that when we get it wrong we can say sorry - and start again. So have confidence in God - let Jesus walk with you on Mondays.

Let us finish with a prayer. Jesus in all our work, in all our doings, help us to put you first, help us to ask what you would do - before we act. Amen.