

EPHESIANS 4:1-7, 11-16
MATTHEW 4:12-22

Gordon E. Ellis
January 20, 2008

ONE MINISTRY, MANY SETTINGS: AT WORK (2nd in a series of 4)
THE GOOD NEWS FROM GRACE VALLEY: Monday Morning Ministries

Well, it's been a QUIET week in Grace Valley, that tiny village of 300 at the TOP of New Hampshire, just below the Canadian border. Grace Valley is COLD and snow-covered these days, with people mostly INDOORS. But there was a FUNERAL in Grace Valley this week, for Joe Davis. Joe was a CRANE operator, who had worked in the U.S. and Canada for over 35 years. But NOW, just a YEAR short of retirement, Joe is DEAD. MANY came to Joe's funeral, FAR more than predicted. And they talked LOVINGLY about this man, whose UNIFORM was a suit of green WORK clothes. They talked about how Joe ALWAYS had a SMILE and a kind word for EVERYONE, how Joe was ALWAYS ready to HELP people in NEED, and how Joe ALWAYS did his job to PERFECTION. They read the SCRIPTURES and 2 QUOTES. The FIRST quote was by Martin Luther King, Jr., who said: *IF it falls to your LOT to be a STREET-SWEEPER, then sweep STREETS like MICHELANGELO carved marble or Shakespeare wrote plays. Sweep STREETS so WELL that all the HOSTS of heaven will HAVE to say: 'Here lies a GREAT sweeper who did his job WELL.'* The SECOND quote was by the 16th Century Protestant Reformer, Martin LUTHER, who said: *ALL Christians are truly PRIESTS, and there is NO distinction among them EXCEPT as to OFFICE.... EVERYBODY who is BAPTIZED may maintain that he has been CONSECRATED as a PRIEST.*

Well JOE, in fact, SAW himself as a PRIEST. He often SAID that his CAREER was being a CRANE operator, but his VOCATION was the PRIESTHOOD. You see, he once heard a SERMON about the PRIESTHOOD of ALL believers, and that SERMON gave him a NEW perspective on his LIFE and WORK. BEFORE the sermon, HE felt like MOST people feel about WORK. He thought of it as BORING and couldn't find much MEANING in it. He worked just to earn MONEY to support what he THOUGHT was the GOOD life. In fact, he had a BUMPER sticker on his CAR that said: *I OWE, I OWE, so OFF to work I go!* But he DIDN'T want to BE there. In fact, he THOUGHT of work as the CURSE of God for the FALL of Adam and Eve. BUT once he heard that SERMON, his perspective CHANGED! The SERMON helped him understand the BIBLICAL view of WORK. You see: the early HEBREWS saw WORK as God's PURPOSE for God's PEOPLE. They viewed WORK a way of praising GOD, while their Middle Eastern neighbors assigned work only to SLAVES and WOMEN. And Joe was reminded that JESUS was a CARPENTER; and that His DISCIPLES were FISHERMAN, TAX collectors, and TENTMAKERS; and that Jesus' PARABLES were about WORKING people: FARMERS and merchants and simple HOUSEHOLDERS. Joe learned how the EARLY Christians viewed themselves as serving CHRIST through their daily WORK and activities; and how LATER, in monasteries, they talked about giving glory to GOD through their daily RHYTHM of work, rest and CONTEMPLATION.

DURING that same sermon about the priesthood of all believers, Joe's minister at the time said that the CHURCH is a community which GATHERS in order to be sent OUT, and that it EXISTS for the SOLE purpose of CONTINUING the ministry and mission of Jesus Christ in the WORLD. He said that 99% of the CHURCH spends 99% of its time APART from the gathered COMMUNITY! SO, we WORSHIP in order to be PREPARED and nourished to go out and LIVE our faith in the midst of our DAILY lives. He said that we CANNOT be genuine

Christians JUST by coming to CHURCH on Sundays! We HAVE to be true to Christ ALL week long, 24-7! Yes, the SPIRIT of Christ HAS to be PRESENT in our BUSINESS deals; our UNION meetings; and our CONCERN for our clients, colleagues and customers.

Well, that VERY day, Joe took his minister's message to HEART. He CHANGED the way he worked, and tried to get everybody ELSE to do the SAME. A BANKER at the funeral, from Littleton, talked about the day that Joe talked to HIM about making his WORK a MINISTRY. And the banker had told Joe that he had TROUBLE seeing his work as HOLY. To HIM, it felt more like a TREADMILL. But Joe ASKED him: *DON'T you help young families acquire HOMES? I remember when I was YOUNG, and my wife and I had 4 young children. The BANKER who made it POSSIBLE for us to buy our FIRST home was very IMPORTANT to us. HIS was a MINISTRY for SURE, though he may not have THOUGHT of it that way!*

Another man, who works at Corning GLASSWARE, told a SIMILAR tale. When Joe told HIM that his work was HOLY, he replied: *Joe, I design TEAPOTS. What's so HOLY about THAT?* And Joe said to him: *My WIFE manages a hotel conference center in Canada. And EVERY day, they host TRAINING events, meetings, and WORKSHOPS for businesses, professional organizations and church groups. Some VERY important, life-changing THINGS happen in those conference rooms. And EVERY day, they use DOZENS of Corningware TEAPOTS. So, DO a good job, my friend, because YOURS is a MINISTRY!*

Well, WHEN it came time for Pastor Peters to speak, he told about how Joe had ASKED him, a few years back, if HE could begin a new GROUP at church, a group to SUPPORT people trying to LIVE their faith on the JOB. Joe wanted to NAME it *Monday Morning Ministries*, even though it met at NIGHT. He always thought that it MIGHT become as popular as *Monday Night Football*. *Course it never DID*, said Pastor Peters, *but I'll BET it's changed more LIVES. We NOW have 3 groups of 12 in our Monday Morning Ministries program, and people come from all over to attend. Well, the DAY before he DIED, when Joe KNEW his death was CLOSE, he said: 'you know, Pastor, OTHER than my LOVE for my LORD, my FAMILY, and neighbors in NEED, the ONE thing that I'm most PROUD of is starting Monday Morning Ministries, and how it HELPS people LIVE their faith on the JOB. Would you TALK about it at my funeral?'*

Well, it TOOK a lot of STUDY, thinking and REVISING, Pastor Peters went on to say, *but Monday Morning Ministries really began to GEL and take OFF when Joe FINALLY settled on 3 simple QUESTIONS that participants are to STRUGGLE with, TALK about, and PERSONALIZE each time they MEET. The FIRST question is simply: WHAT am I CREATING -- and HOW? Do I make GOOD shoes that care for people's feet? Do I grow QUALITY food to feed people? Do I INSPIRE people and add BEAUTY to this world with my MUSIC or my ART? Are the CHILDREN I teach growing up with GOOD values? Do I sweep STREETS, or collect TRASH, or care for YARDS in ways that BEAUTIFY our community and make it a BETTER place to live? OR, am I EXPLOITING people, or the ENVIRONMENT, in order to satisfy my OWN greed, or my EMPLOYER'S? Work is holy, Joe used to say, ONLY when it is CREATIVE and LIFE-GIVING.*

The SECOND question is: What RELATIONSHIPS am I building through my WORK? Do I SERVE others, OR, do I MANIPULATE and EXPLOIT them? Am I concerned with people's NEEDS, OR, do I just want to make the SALE? With my CO-WORKERS, am I COOPERATIVE or COMPETITIVE? Do I GREET people cheerfully, look for POSITIVE things to say, LISTEN to people's problems, KEEP confidences, set a good EXAMPLE for my SUBORDINATES, and show COMPASSION? Do I maintain a good BALANCE between

HOME and WORK? OR, does my work so DOMINATE my life that it HARMS my relationships at HOME? *Work is holy*, he said, *ONLY when it fosters and builds GOOD relationships -- with OTHERS, with GOD, and with SELF.*

And FINALLY, the THIRD question is a simple question of MORALITY: Can I talk PROUDLY about EVERYTHING that I do at WORK? OR, am I CHEATING on my hours or taxes, OVERPRICING my goods and services, UNDERPAYING my employees, sexually HARRASSING a colleague, being DISHONEST with my boss, taking home TOOLS and inventory for PERSONAL use or gain, BACKBITING and CLAWING my way up the ladder, OR maybe just quietly IGNORING the MISTREATMENT of patients or clients? *Work is holy*, Joe would say, ONLY when we feel GOOD about ALL that we do there, and feel COMFORTABLE telling others.

Well, continued Pastor Peters, *these 3 questions form the CORE of Joe Davis' Monday Morning Ministries. And I SUGGEST that, we all USE them to help us make our OWN jobs more HOLY. After all, as Joe REALIZED: our WORK can provide one of our most SIGNIFICANT opportunities for MINISTRY, for being the HANDS and the VOICE of JESUS in this world. And LIKE Joe, I believe that the more HOLY we can MAKE it, the more FULFILLING and LIFE-GIVING it will BECOME.*

Well, before I FINISH my message today, said Pastor Peters, *I want to share a HOLY experience with you that Joe had in his WORK a few years ago. At 9:00am on September 11, 2001, Joe HEARD about planes striking the World Trade Center. And KNOWING that they would need CRANE operators, he jumped into his car and DROVE to New York. NEAR the towers, he found an ABANDONED crane, started it up and went to work, expecting RELIEF after awhile. But Joe WORKED that rubble for over 24 hours straight. And when he could no longer CONTINUE, he walked EXHAUSTED into a nearby CHURCH. A young woman with SPIKED green hair and MULTIPLE piercings APPROACHED him. Now, Joe had ALWAYS been rather traditional. He raised his children with certain RULES – no piercings, no tattoos, no visible tummy, things like that... Well in silence, this young, green-haired woman pulled off Joe's boots, washed and massaged his smelly feet, and put clean, dry SOCKS on him. And I have to tell you that Joe CHANGED that day. He learned that it's NOT about what one LOOKS like, or one's POLITICAL beliefs. No, it's about being PART of the Body of CHRIST. It's about being willing to BE the hands that operate the CRANE, or the HEART that washes tired, smelly FEET. And in the years SINCE then, HE and this young woman have kept in TOUCH, and LEARNED from each other about HOW to be better Christians. In fact, she's here WITH us TODAY, and SHE has started a Monday Morning Ministries program in HER church as well.*

Yes, Joe was RIGHT when he talked about Monday Morning Ministries, and I'd like to suggest that, IN his MEMORY, we ALL become MONDAY Morning MINISTERS, for ALL of us are part of the Body of Christ and the PRIESTHOOD of ALL believers. And THAT'S how Pastor Peters ENDED Joes' funeral this week, which is JUST what Joe would have WANTED. Well, that's the GOOD news from Grace Valley, where ALL the WOMEN are strong, all the MEN are good-looking, and all the CHILDREN are above average. Amen.