

# *Litany for Labor Day Sunday*

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Before humanity fell, “the LORD God planted a garden in Eden, in the east, and there he put the man whom he had formed. Out of the ground the Lord God made to grow every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food... The Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to till it and keep it.” (Gen 2:8-9, 15)

Even before the curse, when Adam was in paradise with God, God gave him a job—to work the ground and maintain the garden. Work that benefits creation is a blessing, and we ourselves were made for this very work.

*Lord who creates and blesses, help us remember that work was given to human beings before the fall ever happened. Help us remember that work is not a curse. Help us remember that you created us for life-giving work that fosters the well-being of the natural world and ourselves.*

Of course, not all work is good work. Some work that we do exploits others and aims at unjust gain. After the leaders of Israel had been driven into exile from the promised land, God’s servant Nehemiah brought a number of them back to Jerusalem, which had been newly rebuilt. He found that some of the returned Jews had been exploiting other Jews in their efforts to do business in their new society. They had been charging interest from each other and forcing many other Jews to enter debt bondage deep enough that it was virtually inescapable. Nehemiah held a great assembly and charged them, and brought about change in the way business was done in Jerusalem. Those who had been exploiting their neighbors agreed to return the wealth they had gained unjustly, and to free those who had entered into debt bondage because of their unreasonable demands.

Exploitation sometimes comes more easily than we expect. Those whom Nehemiah accused did not set out to exploit their neighbors; they were seeking their own benefit without looking at how their practices harmed their neighbors.

*God of mercy and love, help us to remember that one of the greatest commandments is to love our neighbor as ourselves. Help us to remember that those with whom we do business, and those whose work supplies our needs, are our neighbors, whom we are to love. Help us to make the work we do and in the work we create for others to be life-giving work for the benefit of your people. Help us, as stewards of your world, to seek mutual benefit with our neighbors, rather than our own gain at their cost and misfortune.*

The exploitation of the Israelites in Nehemiah’s story created vast economic hardship. But it also created slaves of those very same people God was delivering from slavery in the surrounding nations. These Israelites who were charging interest and acquiring debt-slaves were working against the overarching plan of God for his people, and the victims of their actions could not easily escape.

*God of exile and return, we pray for those both near and far who are trapped in work that enslaves and exploits them. Help us to remember that their plight comes from the brokenness of this world, and is not part of the covenant world into which you will one day bring your people. We pray today for their deliverance—for your kingdom to come among them, to liberate them, and to bring them peace. We pray that, each of us in his or her own way, we may be like Nehemiah in helping*

*to bring near your freeing kingdom. We pray that you would guide us in this, and show us each our role to play.*

Paul wrote to the church in Corinth,

Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of services, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone...For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ...If one member suffers, all suffer together with it; if one member is honored, all rejoice together with it. Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it.

(1 Corinthians 12:4-6, 12, 26-27)

It is easy to draw lines that separate ourselves from others, and it is easy to forget that many who are far away from us are still part of the same body of Christ. But the purpose of our various God-given abilities and talents is to promote the common good of the body of Christ and of the world.

*Life-giving Trinity, your very being is constituted by love. You created us for each other. Help us to remember those far from us and to love them—our neighbors—as ourselves, as you call us to do. Help us to remember that we are all part of the body of Christ, and that we are all meant to contribute to its well-being. When we ignore neighbors near or far, we compromise the body of Christ, sinning against one another and God. Help us to remember this in our everyday choices. Help us to see the ways that our actions and inactions may harm those whom we are called to love, and whose benefit we are called to seek alongside our own.*

Holy One, help us, and all of your people, to seek your will, to recognize it and to do it. We pray all these things in the name of Jesus Christ.

*Amen.*