Perhaps you know the story of Steve Jobs. He is the person, along with his friend, Steve Wozniak, who started Apple Computer. He started Apple in his parent’s garage when he was just 20-years old. And in just 10 years it grew into a $2 billion company with 4000 employees.

When Steve Jobs had barely turned 30, and had just released Apple’s finest creation the Macintosh, he got fired. So how does a person like him get fired from a company he started? Well, as Apple grew they hired someone who they thought was very talented to run the company with Steve. And for the first year or so things went well.

But then their vision of the future began to diverge and they had a falling out. When they did the Board of Directors sided with the new guy. So at age 30 Steve Jobs was very publicly out. Needless to say it was a very devastating time for him.

And yet Steve Jobs said that even though he didn’t see it then, getting fired was the best thing that could have ever happened to him. The heaviness of being successful was replaced by the lightness of being a beginner—being less sure about everything again. He said it freed him to enter one of the most creative periods in his life.

During the next five years he started a company named NeXT, another company named Pixar, and fell in love with an amazing woman who became his wife. Pixar, of course, went on to create the world’s first computer animated feature film, “Toy Story,”—it is really the most successful animation studio in the world (now owned by Disney).

In a remarkable turn of events Apple ended up buying the NeXT Company and Steve Jobs returned to work at Apple. The technology he had developed there became the heart of much of Apple’s renaissance and growth into products today like the I-Phone and I-Pad.

Steve Jobs said that he was sure that none of this would have happened if he hadn’t been fired from Apple. He said it was awful medicine but he needed it. And he said that he and his wife, Lauren, had a wonderful life and family together. (He died, of course, last year.)

Now I know that many of you here today understand completely what Steve Jobs learned in his life. In the twists and turns of your life, and your career, you too may have been fired from your job or left a job that wasn’t right, or where you weren’t growing, or tried something brand new.

The key and hope in all this, of course, is that you find a place where your gifts and talents fit well with the job, where you are feeling that you are growing and changing with the job, and where you feel a sense of ownership and accomplishment. It is when you experience these things that you are able to truly love and enjoy your work.
On this final Sunday of our summer series—this Labor Day Weekend--our focus will be on, “Take This Job and Love It.” The truth is that when you know that your gifts and talents are from God; when you know that God is using you each day as his minister then you can truly take that job and love it.

Philippians 4:4-9 gives us a great attitude with which to live each day: “Rejoice in the Lord always, I will say it again: Rejoice! Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.”

And a little further, “Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things. Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me—put into practice. And the God of peace will be with you.”

The truth is that when you see and understand your life as a calling from God. And when you focus on the good, and wonderful things in life, it is then that your life is filled with more joy and purpose. And that joy is reflected in all you do—at work, home, to your friends, at church.

John Ortberg, in his book “If You Want to Walk on Water, You’ve God to Get Out of the Boat,” sites a medical study in which 122 men who had suffered their first heart attack were evaluated on their degree of hopelessness and pessimism.

Of the 25 most pessimistic men 21 had died eight years later. “Of the 25 most optimistic only 6 had died. Loss of hope increased the odds of death more than 300%. It predicted death more accurately than any medical risk factor including blood pressure, amount of damage to the heart, or cholesterol level.”

Ortberg adds his own humorous interpretation to the study: “Better to eat Twinkies in hope than to eat broccoli in despair.” It is amazing how our attitude and feelings about life, and our vision and purpose each day, help us live a more full and complete life.

This is why it is so important to see our work, our life, our volunteering as all part of our calling from God. For if we see God’s purpose in our work and the things we do it gives us energy to get up everyday with joy and optimism to face the new day—to love what we do.

It gives us joy and a positive outlook as we do our work and jobs with others, and as we help in the community and the church. As you all know it is much more enjoyable to be around fellow workers, and fellow volunteers, who are joyful and love what they do. It lifts your spirits.

And what a difference that also makes in our work and ministry as a church. I remember visiting a church one Sunday where the greeters were sullen, the ushers looked like they hated what they were doing, the music was labored and the pastor looked like he wanted to be elsewhere.

Needless to say this spirit seemed to carry over to the rest of the congregation. Congregation members seemed to have pained looks on their faces. The singing and participation was luke-warm. And when we went to the coffee/fellowship time no one greeted or welcomed us.
In fact, in trying to reach out ourselves we greeted and visited with a family who were also visiting, and who also had no one greet or reach out to them. So we, the guests, shared stories and laughed with these other guests.

Now contrast that with a church I visited not too long ago while attending a conference. As we came to the church there was a woman, a greeter, standing outside the front door welcoming everyone who came. She had a big smile on her face which reflected pure joy in her heart as she reached out to everyone and told them how excited she was that they were there.

Inside at the Welcome Center and with welcoming hosts around their narthex the people were making a point of joyfully welcoming each person and asking them if they needed directions or help. Upon entering the sanctuary the ushers too welcomed people with a smile.

And in the worship there was a meaningful time of greeting and welcome. The musicians smiled and lead music that had life and vitality. And the preaching pastor was excited and passionate about his message about Jesus. The whole experience, from entering the building to the fellowship following, made me feel like I wanted to come back.

I firmly believe, my friends, that this only happens when people see and are captured by a belief that their life, their job, their involvement in the community and their participation in the church are all callings from God. It only happens when people are using their gifts in the right place.

And it only comes, I believe, when people see a bigger vision for their ministry in life and in the church. It is when you see God’s purposes being lived out in you, and when you realize your life has eternal significance, and when you are motivated by the hope that others also come to faith in Jesus, it is then that you can truly take your job and love it.

I believe this woman greeter outside the church door believed with all her heart that her welcoming people that day would lift some people’s spirits. I believe she believed that her ministry of welcome could open some people up to hear the message of Jesus, which could change their lives, and change the whole trajectory of their existence.

My friends that is our hope and prayer for each one of you today. I pray that you might see your life, your work, and your talents as gifts from God. I pray that you might be finding joy in your work and lives each day, and might truly love what you do.

And I pray that you are also finding a place to use and share your gifts here at Messiah. I pray that you are finding joy in your service and outreach in the name of Jesus. For then you too can live out the words of Paul in Philippians: “Rejoice in the Lord always, again I will say: Rejoice!”

(Starting September 16—CSI Critical Searching Inquiries—I will seek to answer questions you may have about God, faith, church, etc. Invite someone to worship with you.)