



good shepherd
presbyterian church

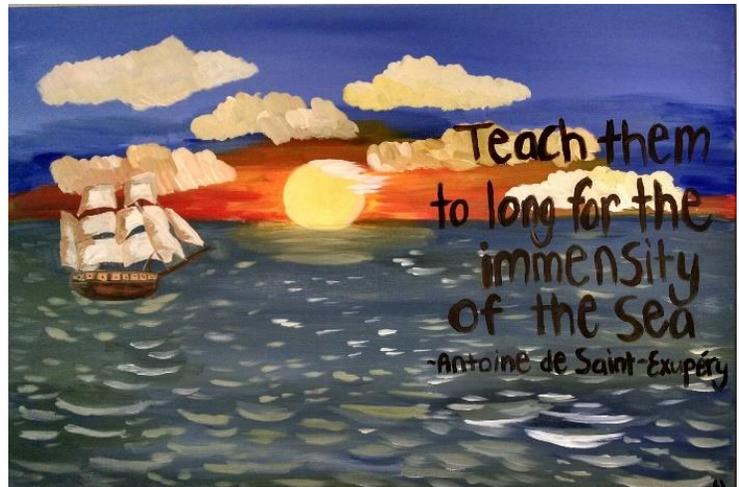
Poiema (Workmanship)

Romans 1:20; Ephesians 2:8-10; Psalm 92:1-4

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Several years ago I ran across a quote that I liked. One of my daughter Abby's friends was a budding artist and I asked her to paint a scene to go with that quote, and I hung the painting in my office. Abby's friend, the artist, is Brooke Drury, and this is what she painted for me. I wanted to show it to you because it embodies the word we are going to focus on today: *poiema*. That is



a Greek word which is very rare in the New Testament, but which is important to our understanding of grace and works. In fact that's what the word means: 'work'. But do you hear what it sounds like? It sounds like 'poem', right? And that gives you a better sense of the kind of work it describes. In fact, it is better; translated as 'workmanship' – the kind of work that an artist or craftsman makes, reflecting the creative purpose and will of that artist. So this painting is Brooke's *poiema*, her "work of art."

Poiema only occurs two times in the New Testament, in the two readings you heard this morning. It is also used in the Greek translation of the Old Testament another handful of times, like in Psalm 92, which we read for our Call to Worship. There, in v. 4, it translates "the work of [God's] hands."

Today I want to look with you at this idea of 'works' – both God's and ours.

Works of Revelation (Romans 1:20)

Let's start with God's works. The verse we read from Romans 1:20 says this: "For since the creation of the world [God's] invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse." Now this verse is part of a "they are without excuse" argument, but I want to focus in on what is said here as part of that argument. And that is that ***God's eternal power and divine nature have been made visible in creation, and understandable as such through what has been made.*** That "what has been made" is *poiema*, God's handiwork.

While Brooke's painting conveys a message itself, it also reveals some things about her. She is creative. She sees and imagines in color. Though you may not know it just from this painting, she was not copying a photo or real scene, she created this from the short phrase I gave her. If a human painting can reveal something about the artist, how much more can this world and everything in it reveal about the Creator?

Romans tells us that creation reveals God's power and nature. We can "see" (at least in part) the invisible God through the visible creation and we can understand (at least in part) something about God.

Works that Bless Others (Ephesians 2:8-10)

And that's amazing all unto itself, but there's more! The second chapter of Ephesians is describing God's grace, the gift of salvation not because of anything we've done but because of everything God has done. It's clearly said in vv.8-9: "For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast."

But we are supposed to do good, right? There are all those commandments, not least of which is "love your neighbor." And we often read in scripture about the importance of showing mercy and compassion, working for justice, and living rightly before God. So if not for our salvation (and it's not), how do those good works fit in to our lives?

This is where Ephesians uses the word *poiema* to great effect. From the general description of creation as God's *poiema*, now WE are God's

handiwork, God's poems. It's there in verse 10: "For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them." God made us for good works! And that fits with the account of creation in Genesis. It records God creating the world and everything in it. After each part of creation God declared, "It is good." But at the end, when God created humanity, in God's own image. And God declared it "VERY good."

We are part of all creation that reveals something about what God is like. But just like the apple tree Christy described in the children's sermon, God created us with another purpose: to do good works... to bless others.

Let me offer another illustration. Have you ever seen a well-crafted table. If you want to see one crafted by hand, check out the one in the church library. Jim Terrell made that for us by hand and it is a beautiful table. As with any artistic creation, it reveals something about the one who made it. But consider a well-crafted kitchen or dining room table. That, too, might reveal something about its creator; but it is also made for a particular purpose... to seat people and provide for a place for food to be served, shared, and eaten. Jim made our library table as a beautiful, spacious, place for meetings, classes, and study.

Ephesians 2:10 has the word 'work' in it twice. We are God's 'workmanship' (*poiema*), made to reveal God the artist, but also made with a purpose... FOR good works. This is another word for work: *ergon* (like ergonomic). The point is that God made us like the apple tree or like the hand-crafted kitchen table, both to reveal something about God's nature and glory, but also for a purpose in the world: to bless the world around us (which ALSO reveals something of what God is like!).

I share all this to re-frame your thinking about good and godly works. They are not to be weighed on the scales of salvation or to get you across the finish line into heaven. Rather, they are you and I fulfilling the purpose for which God made us: to reveal something to the world around us of what God is like through loving, caring, and serving the people around us. In one sense it's just following Jesus and obeying what he taught us. But I think the illustration and language of us as God's creative and purposed works of art helps us understand a little more how God uses us in the world.

A Vision of God's Glory

I want to finish by returning to Brooke's painting that hangs in my office. I actually asked her to paint it for me. I had been inspired by a quote from Antoine de Saint-Exupery, the author of *The Little Prince*. He wrote, "If you want to build a ship, don't drum up people to collect wood and don't assign them tasks and work, but rather teach them to long for the endless immensity of the sea." The idea is that what truly motivates people to work is vision and a dream rather than a list of tasks. That seemed applicable to the work of the church, which can sometimes become a list of tasks rather than a living out of our vision of God's glory. Scripture teaches that God and God's glory are the heart, the motivation, and the source of what we do and how we do it.

It strikes me that, as God's *poiema* works of art, we are like this painting in two ways. We are like the painting, meant to reveal something about the artist and the purpose of the painting. And we are living out the sentiment of the quote itself. God didn't just hand down a list of tasks for humans to do, but revealed his glory and purpose to us and through us that the world might catch a glimpse of the greater vision of who God is.

As you move through your week, consider how what you say and do is not just a list of good or bad choices, but part of God's artistic and creative work in the world. You are showing people the face of God in what you say and in what you do.

To God be the glory! Amen!