THE SCHOOL
FOR CHRISTIAN FAITH & LEADERSHIP
Episcopal Diocese of Washington

Being With Federal Works Reflection
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I am grateful for the opportunity to be with you.
I offer these brief reflections, mindful of the sadness and uncertainty of this time and confident of God's desire to be with you, and to see you through the wilderness.

Watching what is happening to so many in the federal workforce, and how you are being treated, the word that comes to mind is *betrayal.* While there are no guarantees in life or work, the violation of trust and the disregard of your dignity have been egregious. This is moral injury on a massive scale.

I'm so sorry that this is happening to you.

There is a particular vulnerability we feel when our ability to provide for ourselves and our loved ones is destabilized, and it runs deep, touching some of our deep fears.

And because work is such a defining aspect of our identities and relationships, the shock of losing our work, or the fear of losing it, touches upon nearly everything about us.

But there is so much more to say about who you are and what is true about you.

So let me to teach you the refrain of a folk song that I love, which goes like this:

Our life is more than our work
And our work is more than our job.

Sing along with me.

Our life is more than our work
And our work is more than our job.

Let's think about work in broad terms, and about life that is more than our work. I don't mean to minimize the pain of job loss and the worry you feel. The intention is to surround the loss with spiritual and relational resources, so that it's easier to bear. .

My mother, the physical therapist, used to tell her patients (and her daughters) that one way to treat a vulnerability in one's body is to surround it with strength. She was talking about joints and muscles, but it's an insight with broad application. Whenever we're dealing with a vulnerability, or whatever it is that we can't fix and may not get better anytime soon, one path forward is to surround the vulnerability with strength.

That is our aim tonight.
Surely that is God's desire for us all–that we experience grace and love, mercy and divine guidance in the places where we feel most vulnerable.

So I invite you to close your eyes or soften your gaze and take several deep breaths.

Breathe in. And out.
In. And out.
In. And out.

With your mind's eye, imagine God's loving gaze upon you and those dear to you. However you see or sense God, consider the amazing possibility that God sees you, knows you, and loves you.

Hear for yourself the words that Jesus heard when he rose from the waters of baptism and again when he stood on a mountaintop seeking clarity at one of the most decisive moments of his life:

You are my beloved. You are my beloved.
Say your name aloud. Then say: I am God's beloved.

I wonder what God would like to say to you about the value of your work.

I imagine that the first thing God would say is *thank you.* Thank you for your good work. Thank you for showing up each day, doing the hard things, and being there for your co-workers.

God knows your life's work is not defined by your employment. Those who love you know how hard you work–at your job, yes, but throughout your life and relationships. And it isn't just what you do, but who you are, and how you care for others.

The Rev. Anna Olson says it this way:

The value of our presence is not just in completing tasks, or contributing to profit or success, but also the way we treat others as we go about our work – coworkers, customers, people we serve. We really have only one job description: love. We are called to love God and one another. Our day jobs are just one of the places in our lives where we are called to do our true work.

The second thing that I believe that God wants to say to you is that you are so much more to God, and to those who love you, than your work. Hard as it may be to do right now, this is a good time to remember all the things that you love about your life that have nothing to do with work, or at least not about your employment.

The poet Emily Dickinson once wrote that the only biblical commandment she ever obeyed was "Consider the lilies." This is a good time for you to consider the lilies, look at the birds, get outside, or to bury your nose in a book or do whatever it is that gives you joy. Amid the many practicalities and urgencies to tend to–and there are many–one way to surround vulnerability with strength is to tap into your joy.

One last thing that I imagine God wanting to say is a reminder that you are endowed with resilience–the amazing inner capacity that enables you to grow stronger through adversity and thrive in new circumstances. Resilience is what enables us to recover from a traumatic experience and go on to live joyful lives–not by denying the trauma, but by surrounding it with healing and strength, so that it remains a part of our life story, but never what defines us.

Resilience is in us at a cellular level, and it's contagious. We gain resilience from one another–in friendship, community, and from the inspired examples of those who have made it through the traumas of their lives with love in their hearts.

Now is a good time to gather in our families, circle of friends, or in church, and talk of our life experiences and the people who inspire you. Each time we do, we tap into our God-given resilience, enabling us not only to persevere, but live each day with grace.

At my mothers' memorial service last month, we sang *Amazing Grace.* Consider waking up each morning and singing to yourself its final verse:

Through many dangers, toils and snares
We have already come.
'Tis grace has brought us safe thus far,
And grace will lead us home.

May the grace that has brought you through in the past, be with you, and sustain you in the days ahead.

Amen.