

Devotion, Week of September 6, 2026

Rev. Jeanne Simpson

This week we celebrate Labor Day. Labor Day weekend marks the unofficial end of summer for many Americans. But have you ever wondered why a holiday with “labor” in the name is all about taking a break? Labor Day honors the contributions and achievements of American workers—and the labor movement’s long fight for better pay, safer conditions, and shorter hours. Terri Robertson, Editor of Country Living magazine, explains.

In the decades after the Civil War, the United States was rapidly industrializing. Many workers in factories, mills, mines, and railroads faced long hours, low pay, unsafe conditions, and little legal protection. Labor unions and other worker organizations pushed for changes, including the eight-hour workday.

One early Labor Day celebration took place in New York City on September 5, 1882. Organized by the Central Labor Union, the event began with a parade from City Hall to Union Square, followed by speeches and a picnic. An estimated 10,000 people participated—many of them taking the day off without pay.

Labor Day’s national recognition came amid another major chapter in labor history: the Pullman Strike of 1894. Workers at the Pullman Palace Car Company near Chicago went on strike after wage cuts, and the American Railway Union, led by Eugene V. Debs, organized a nationwide boycott of Pullman cars. The boycott disrupted rail traffic and mail service. Federal troops and U.S. Marshals were sent in, and fighting between troops and workers left dozens of people dead. Against this backdrop, Congress passed legislation establishing Labor Day, and President Cleveland signed it into law on June 28, 1894.

So while you’re out looking for the best Labor Day clearance sales, having a last “summer” vacation, or eating your heart out with family and friends, take a moment to remember what the holiday is really about: the workers who keep the country moving—and the generations of workers who fought to make jobs safer and fairer.

Jeanne