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## Heart and Soul ... A Weekly Meditation

January 24, 2016

Our Daily Work

*“Isn’t this the carpenter?”*  
Mark 6:3 (Common English Bible)

It is an encouragement to recall, that in the days of his flesh, our Lord had a job to go to each day. Daily work was as much a part of the rhythm of life for Jesus as it is for us. Often we permit more impressive accounts of Jesus’ life to minimize or eclipse this simple reality – Jesus had to make a living for his family, just as we do. This detail of Jesus’ life is not insignificant and the church is grateful to Mark’s Gospel for including it. It is essential for our total view of the Lord’s humanity. This knowledge underscores that Jesus entered fully into our humanity and brings him closer to the life of the common person. Additionally, Jesus’ work provides a rich perspective for understanding our own daily work.

First, Jesus’ occupation as a carpenter brings dignity to all honest toil. In the day of Jesus, any form of manual labor was despised; such occupations were considered the unfortunate lot of slaves. A gentleman or lady would not engage in any activity that would result in soiled hands, or worse, callouses. Deeply embedded in the culture was the conviction that bodily work, particularly hard physical labor, is unworthy of a respectable, free person. Many considered such work degrading. Such was the prevailing culture into which Jesus was born, raised and worked. So, when the question is raised, as it is here in Mark’s Gospel, “Isn’t this the carpenter?” it is spoken with contempt. It is, as we would say today, an attempt to put Jesus “in his place.”

Second, any careful observer of Jesus’ life recognizes that the dominant motive behind all that he did was to please his heavenly Father. He declares this himself; “I always do what makes him (God) happy. (John 8:29)” One may feel sure that this same attitude was never absent in the exercise of his vocation as a carpenter. This motive to please God was redemptive – Jesus never found his physical labor distasteful or boring. Rather than dragging himself to the carpenter’s shop each morning, Jesus must have arrived to his daily work with enthusiasm. Not because the work was easy or pleasant or even profitable but because by completing a job well, he brought joy to his Father in heaven.

Perhaps, most important, Jesus’ work as a carpenter enriched his sympathy and understanding of our common life and prepared him for his redemptive mission. While it is true that for the last three years of his life, Jesus was a professional – a healer, a teacher and equipper for ministry – he worked with his hands for a much longer period of time. He knew what it was to experience hardship and fatigue and to make ends meet on a small income. As a carpenter, Jesus faced many of the same situations and problems similar to those we face. Townspeople sought to diminish Jesus that day by pointing out that he was a carpenter. But their words have become our confidence that Jesus truly did enter fully into our common condition and showed us the way to live with grace and dignity.

Doug Hood