

God in All of Life
2 Corinthians 4:4-10
John Breon

Jesus was a blue-collar man.
He was born in a dung-infested sheep shed to peasant parents,
and He grew up in His father's carpenter shop.

As a consequence,
He talked the language of common men,
understood the life they lived,
their little hardships,
the things they had to contend with day after day.

He knew what it was like to struggle to make ends meet.
He was old beyond His years, of necessity,
for as the firstborn,
He became head of the family at an early age
following His father's untimely death.

Life wasn't easy,
the days were long, the work hard,
and He learned to get by on meager fare.

On top of everything else, there was the prejudice—
whispers about the legitimacy of His birth,
He was a Jew in a Roman world,
and a carpenter before it was recognized
as a viable trade.

Granted there was royalty in His family tree,
'way back—and long since forgotten,
of no interest now,
except to the genealogists.

He was a blue-collar man,
not a blue-blood.

His hands were rough and calloused,
familiar with hard work.

He was a common man among common men,
He lived where they lived...
fishermen,
tax collectors,
shepherds,
street vendors...
and He loved them all, everyone,
outcasts of all kinds ... the untouchables...
lepers,
lunatics,
Samaritans,
street people,
and women taken in adultery.

He was concerned about the kinds of things
that concern common people—
children,
paying taxes,
bread and fish when you're hungry,
running out of wine at your daughter's wedding.

Other things too that concern us all—
like learning how to pray,
not just words,
but really communicating with God.

And He talked a lot about loving each other,
turning the other cheek,
going the second mile.

He loved kids and crowds,
celebrations and solitude,
miracles and quiet meals with old friends.

He was a blue-collar man,
with hands hard and calloused,
from years of manual labor.

Yet His touch was gentle and healing,
strong and reassuring.

He was a blue-collar man,
and He calls us to be blue-collar people too.

Not pseudo-intellectuals theorizing about human need,
not bleeding hearts trapped in sentimentality,
but real, honest-to-goodness people,
resolving human conflict,
restoring shattered self-esteem,
loving the loveless,
and washing tired feet—
even when there's no one to watch.

Jesus was a blue-collar man.

(Richard Exley, *Blue Collar Christianity* 21-23)

That helps us see something of the reality of God's incarnation in Jesus Christ. The word incarnation means "enfleshment" or becoming flesh. It's what John's Gospel means when it says that the Word was with God and the Word was God, and the Word *became flesh* and dwelt among us (1:1, 14). When the Word, the Son, the self-expression of God became flesh, he became fully human. He entered fully into human life.

And, as the apostle Paul says later, *Christ is the image of God*. He's not some faint, faded copy of the original. He is the image who truly represents and reveals God. He shows us God's glory. And he does it in the flesh, as a human being. The gospel, the good news of Jesus, reflects and conveys that glory. The gospel comes to us in real life, through real people.

Jesus became fully human to redeem and transform and make holy all of human life, every stage and every part of life. He did it to show us

how to live as God intends. He also did it so that he could resist sin, die for all sinners, and rise in victory over sin and death.

As Christians, as the church, we're called to live on the basis of what God did in the Incarnation. The story of God coming in Christ is our story. Even more, the reality is our reality. We live because of what God did in Jesus. That's where we get salvation, life, identity, and meaning.

God's incarnation in Jesus is unique and unrepeatable. And yet, the church in some way is to continue the incarnation. We are the Body of Christ, filled with God's own Spirit. The church is an important part of Christ's continuing presence in the world. We're called in our life together and as individuals to live in such a way that God's presence is made known in and through us. We can see and experience and communicate God in all of life. Richard Foster calls this "the Incarnational Stream."

This is one of our "core values," those beliefs and commitments and experiences that make the church really the church. This is part of who we are, part of what nourishes and guides the kind of people we are and the kind of action we take.

We've already seen how God not only made himself known, but actually became human in Jesus. Jesus is absolutely unique. He's both fully God and fully human. We mustn't forget that Jesus lived as a human being. He lived a fully human life.

We can't repeat the Incarnation. But we can live an incarnational life. God's reality and presence and power and love can be made known in us and through us. Foster also calls this the "sacramental life." We usually define a sacrament as "an outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual grace." Baptism and Communion are the sacraments that we celebrate. Other churches claim other acts as sacraments and still others observe no sacraments.

There are special and unique sacraments. But in some way, all of Christian living is sacramental. Our entire life, our being as people in Christ, can be a sign of God's reality and presence. In our physical life in the material world we can reflect and make known the spiritual life of the invisible world. The invisible and spiritual is as real as the physical, but it's perceived differently. We can show it to be real by the way we live.

We sometimes talk about Christ's "real presence" in Communion. It occurred to me one day that the real presence of Christ in Communion is a sign of his real presence in all of life. The idea in the Incarnational Stream is for all of life to be such a sign—for all that we say and do to manifest God's grace in us. The specific sacraments of Baptism and, especially, Communion remind us of this. Those special moments given to God remind us that all moments are God's. How we're open to God in those special moments helps us be open to God all the time. The presence of God in the sacraments is simply the focused presence of God we always live in.

In Exodus, God told Moses to build the tabernacle as a place of worship and a place for God's presence to remain with Israel. God chose a man named Bezalel and filled him with the Holy Spirit to enable him to be a craftsman and to oversee the tabernacle's construction. The work of Bezalel's hands became an instrument for people to experience God's presence.

God wants to use who we are, to fill us with the Holy Spirit, to give us gifts and abilities to do and to make things that will help people see and experience God. God wants to use your job. We said that Jesus was a "blue-collar" man. But he was also a "white-collar" man—he was a teacher. He redeems all kinds of human labor and work and he uses it to reveal his presence. God wants to use your family. God wants to use your daily life as a "tabernacle" for God's presence.

It's interesting that in John's Gospel, when he says that the Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us, the word for "made his dwelling" is related to the word for tabernacle or tent. God the Son pitched his tent with us. Jesus replaced the tabernacle and the temple of the old covenant as the dwelling place of God. Jesus is the meeting place for God and people.

Later in the New Testament, the church is called the temple of God and the Body of Christ. We've already seen that this means the church continues the incarnation in some sense. In the life of God's people, God is revealed and made known.

In the passage we read from 2 Corinthians, Paul sees his and his associates' ministry as a vehicle or container for God's life and light

revealed in Jesus Christ. The apostolic ministry and so the church's ministry is the container for a power greater than we are. God, who reveals himself in Jesus, puts this treasure in us "jars of clay." This shows that the power is God's and not ours. As we identify with Jesus in his death, we help reveal his life, his resurrection power.

John Michael Talbot was a pioneer of "Jesus Music." In the late 70s, he recorded a musical version of a Communion service. I love how he expresses this part of the service:

Take this bread, take this bread,
It is my body, broken for you
Take this cup, take this cup,
It is my blood that is shed for you
If we proclaim the death of Jesus
We shall rise with him to live forever

With this bread, with this bread we must be broken
With this cup, with this cup, our lives must be given
If we proclaim the rising of Jesus
We must die with him to live forever

Christ has died, Christ is risen, Christ will come again

Dying, he destroyed our dying
And rising, he brings new life again
Come, Lord Jesus, come again

So we offer to you, now, our Father
This cup of new wine and this bread
And may all who share the Lord's death
Be resurrected with him
Lord Jesus, send now your Spirit
Come fill our new life with your love
As the bread and the wine are one, may your people be one.

("Communion Song," *The Lord's Supper*, available at <http://johnmichaeltalbot.com/index.cfm?load=page&page=240>)

We identify with Jesus in his dying and we reveal his life in "religious" experiences like worship and sacrament and what we normally call spiritual or religious. But, there's more. There's really no division between sacred and secular, spiritual and everyday life. We're to incorporate this life and light and power and love of God into all we are and all we do. We bring it into everyday life. Including our suffering. That's what Paul was talking about—showing the death of Jesus in his own sufferings and through that also showing the resurrection life of Jesus.

If you go to a store and look at a demo model of machinery or an appliance or a computer, it's great that it's on display and works in the store. But if you buy one, take it home, and discover that it won't start or doesn't work, it doesn't do you any good. The fact that it worked in the store doesn't matter if it doesn't work at your house. Jesus wants us to know that the life and power he gives will "work" right where we are.

Foster says that the primary places that God's life is revealed in us are our homes, our work, and in society at large. And God's life is revealed in us not just as we do "religious" things in those settings, but as we do *all things* to the glory of God in the name of the Lord Jesus (1 Cor 10:31; Col 3:17).

There are practical things we can do to experience this stream of Christian faith and life. Look at your activities and involvements and think about how you experience the presence of God in each one. Be willing for God to take away the barrier that keeps God on the outside of your life. Do all your work in honor of God.

When we receive Communion or the Eucharist, we can connect it to the rest of life.

Prepare to receive the sacrament by taking a mental inventory of ways God has helped you bring his presence into your family, workplace, and social contacts during the past six days. Then receive the Eucharist joyfully, knowing that Jesus Christ is truly present to you and longs to strengthen you and teach you daily. Say a prayer of

thanksgiving for his presence in your life and ask him to be with you during the coming week. (James Bryan Smith and Lynda Graybeal, *A Spiritual Formation Workbook* 73)