

Hand Made: Going Deeper on your Journey with God

Week 4: In the Carpenter's Workshop

The Right Wood for the Job

As we come into a time of quiet reflection, we acknowledge the God who sees us, and knows us. Who looks upon us with love and desires for us to become our fullest selves, the people he is creating us to be in the world.

I invite you to take a look back at the verse we began with in the first week:

"For we are God's handiwork [or workmanship, work of craftsmanship, work of art, the Greek word used is "poiema", from which we get "poem"] created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do." (Ephesians 2:10)

As we've considered over the last few weeks, that act of creation is dynamic, it's ongoing. I would suggest that both the "creation" and the "good works" are evolving, as we change and grow, not set in stone. But notice that connection between the act of making and the things we might be and do in the world.

And to place alongside that, a verse from James:

"My brothers and sisters, can a fig tree bear olives, or a grapevine bear figs?" (James 3:12)

Noticing that when we talk about bearing fruit, the kind of fruit we bear will come from the kind of plant we are. Sometimes there are expectations from ourselves, or from other people, that we will bear a certain kind of fruit when that isn't the kind of plant we are.

Just as there are different types of wood with many different qualities, what are some of the particular qualities of the person (or the tree) you are?

Now think about some of the different roles you have taken on during your life, whether that's in work, in the family, in the church, or somewhere else, and to what extent they have worked with the grain of who you are, or against the grain of who you are?

Is there a role, a job, a way of being which felt like it was with the grain? Where the wood was allowed to do the thing it was best at doing?

Is there something which felt like it was going against the grain? And what did that feel like? Perhaps because that was a bad fit for you. Or it might be that the forming was not a smooth process at this point - like Callum Robinson with his oak of considerable character - and maybe something else came from it?

And take a moment to think about where we are now, and how God is looking on us now in who we are in the world, what we do, in our various roles. And what we might hope for, or dream of, for the future. Is there anything we want to say to God now? And do we notice God saying anything back to us?



Jesus the Carpenter

We know very little about Jesus' life before he began his ministry, but we do know that, by the time he was dazzling the Teachers of the Law with his knowledge in the Temple, aged about 12, he was growing up in Joseph's carpentry workshop in Nazareth. Tradition suggests that at some point Joseph may have died and Jesus succeeded him as the master carpenter. In Mark chapter 6, when Jesus returns to preach in the synagogue at Nazareth, having begun his public ministry, some local people greet him with derision: "Where did this man get these things?" they ask. "Isn't this the carpenter?"

What did Jesus learn in the carpenter's workshop? What did he take with him from those years, when the time came to close the workshop door and move into the next stage of his life? What did craft teach him about God, about people, about himself?

Take time to picture the carpenter's workshop, using all your senses. The smell of fresh timber. The light coming in through the door. Think about the noises you hear, and what you might see — tools hanging on the wall within easy reach, planks of fresh wood of different sizes. Take time to consider what point in Jesus' story is drawing you — is he a child, a young man helping his father, an adult gradually taking on responsibilities, or the master-craftsman himself?

If it's helpful, you might like to reflect with the painting, John Everett Millais' *Christ in the House of His Parents (The Carpenter's Workshop)* on the next page. But you might also prefer to imagine your own picture.

Give yourself time to let this picture take shape in your mind. Think about who is coming and going, what kind of work is being done. What is Jesus doing? Is he working on something at the work bench? Is he talking to someone? Give yourself freedom to imagine, and don't worry if something surprises you.

Watch Jesus carefully. How is he going about his work? How is he with those around him — the young apprentice, the difficult customer? You might like to stay with the workshop for a time, imagine a day, or a series of different encounters. Let yourself become absorbed watching Jesus at work.

"There is a deep centredness in trusting one's hands, mind, and imagination to work as a single well-tuned instrument, a centredness that touches upon the very essence of fulfillment. What better way to inhabit one's selfhood to the maximum than exercising one's innate human capabilities productively and powerfully, like an engine firing smoothly on all pistons?"

Peter Korn, *Why We Make Things & Why It Matters*, Vintage, 2013

"Brute force is counterproductive in craftsmanship. The craftsman is strong but his strength is restrained. He knows exactly when to exercise force and when to restrain it, is as capable of a delicate, gentle touch as a strong decisive one. The power of the craftsman is soft power. It is in the balance of strength and gentleness that beautiful objects are made."

Richard Sennett, *The Craftsman*, Penguin, 2009





Christ in the House of His Parents (The Carpenter's Workshop) by John Everett Millais

Woodworkers Talking About Wood

"Every material has distinctive physical properties. Among species of wood there are significant variations in colour, grain, porosity, density, pliability, strength, rot resistance and other working qualities. Within smaller parameters, the same factors vary among boards of the same species, and even within a single board. To work his medium successfully, the craftsman adapts to its character and quirks, even as he subjects it to his will. Over time he learns to read his material through its response to hand and tools."

Peter Korn, *Why We Make Things & Why It Matters*, Vintage, 2013

"There are certain craft processes where you are basically having to beat the material into submission in order to make it do what you want it to do. With Windsor chairs, it's like generations of humans have approached the material and basically figured out what it does best. Then you try to figure out how to make what it does best look pretty good. And then sit in that."

Aspen Golann, *Cut the Craft* podcast, episode 033, recorded 25/6/21

"[Tim] Stead later committed himself to using only native timbers, notably heavily burred elm and other 'imperfect' wood previously considered unfit for anything other than firewood... Typically Stead preferred to validate their forms rather than subjugate them. Increasingly, the wood was allowed to speak for itself."

Alex Fraser from *With the Grain: An Appreciation of Tim Stead*, ed. Giles Sutherland, Birlinn, 2005