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Blue Collar God Genesis 2:1-7

How many of you are *Downton Abbey* fans? How many find watching *Downton Abbey* as pleasant as having your eyelids tattooed? For the uninitiated among you, *Downton Abbey* is a British TV series about an early twentieth century English country estate. It is the home of the aristocratic Crawley family... and their servants. The opening credits are interesting because you never see a face; only images of work: a servant's bell, a boiling kettle, the dusting of a chandelier, carefully measuring place-settings on the table with a ruler (that's my job at dinner time). The only glimpse you have of an aristocrat is in the first few seconds when you spot the Earl walking his beloved dog. Otherwise, these are all images of work being done by anonymous servants.

The Crawley family lives a life of privilege and ease. Their breakfast is brought to them in bed. Their servants dress them. Their house is designed to keep the workers... and the work they do... out of sight as much as possible. The family's every need is anticipated and cared for. It is a life of luxury built upon the hard work of their servants.

For the next few weeks we are going to talk about work. It is estimated that something like 57% of our waking hours during our 40 plus working years are devoted to work. Fifty-seven percent! Most of us are Christians. We have dedicated our lives to following Jesus. We stumble along the way; we do better at some times than others. But if our best selves are serious about the Lordship of Christ over every area of our life, then surely it should matter to us whether Christ is, in fact, Lord of our work, too? Shouldn't it?

Unfortunately, for too many Christians, there is a huge Sunday/Monday divide. We show up at church, do our religious thing, go home and enjoy the rest of the Sabbath. And then, Monday morning, we return to the "real" world... the world of work. And we have a hard time connecting the "spiritual" side of ourselves with the "work" side of ourselves. I talked with a business leader about this last week. He said, "A lot of us business guys feel at odds with our church life. We struggle with how the two go together. We struggle with how much money we make, how much we give... or don't give, especially if we aren't tithing yet. We struggle because sometimes our leadership requires tough talk and tough actions. Chewing people out, firing them, even... and then we are accused of not being very Christian. We don't know how to be at ease with our work."

What if I were to tell you that our “spiritual side” and our “work side” are meant to be the same thing? What if I said that God is just as interested in the way you work as He is in the way you worship? In fact, that your work is worship... or at least, it can be! Would you believe that God could be interested in the 40 or 50 or 60 hours you all spend teaching kids and healing bodies and reconciling accounts and building web sites and drilling your soldiers and making a profit and shuttling your children and going to school and putting out fires... just as interested in you in those settings as he is when you are seated in these pews, singing his praises? What if I told you that God loves work... that God loves your work? Would you believe that?

Well, I’m going to tell you that... over and over again. Where do we start? How about here: what does God think about work? For thousands of years—as long as people have pondered such things—there was a prevailing impression that gods did not work. Work was beneath them. Work was something done by their created beings so that the gods could enjoy an eternal life of leisure. Just like *Downton Abbey*... workers exist so that aristocrats can while away their days in ease! Workers exist so that Lord Grantham can walk his dog around the country estate. In religious terms, humans work; gods have fun.

That was the universal view of work and religion for thousands of years. Then Yahweh revealed himself to Abraham and later, to Moses and suddenly, we had an entirely different glimpse of God and of work. And to our surprise, we discover that Yahweh is a working God... a Blue Collar God. Listen. [Read Genesis 2:1-7]

The name of the first book of the Bible is *Genesis* and it comes from the very first word in the Bible which is translated “in the beginning.” It is the account of the origins of the cosmos. Now, Genesis is not the only ancient account of how things got started. The Mesopotamians had a book called Enuma Elish; the Greeks had stories about creation, too. But the Genesis account is utterly unique from every other religious account in this way: In Genesis, creation is a result of God’s hard work.

In Enuma Elish, there is a great battle between the gods. The creation of the cosmos results from this spiritual conflict between competing deities. Ultimately, the gods create human beings so they have someone to do work for them. And in the Greek myths, gods and humans exist together in a beautiful garden... but no one does any work; they just lounge and eat the food that magically grows there.

But the biblical account of creation shows Yahweh at work, and he works hard... and fast! In chapter 1, God creates the entire cosmos in a period of six days. How does he create? By His word! He speaks and things spring into existence. “Let there be light. Let the water teem with living creatures. Let us create man in our own image.” God works—he creates—and He seems to be having a ball as He does so! Every time God creates something, he looks at it, and says: “That’s good!” You get the impression he is cheering himself on. “Yeah me! Good job!

What a beautiful universe I've just created." And in the end, when he stands back and surveys everything he has made by his work, he says..."That is very good!" God is proud of his work!

Do you know that feeling of pride? Of satisfaction at a job well done? When was the last time you stood back, looked at your handiwork and said, "That is very good!" I felt that again this year on our build trip with the high school kids in Mexico. When, at the end of four hard days of work, you look at a house standing on what was just a plot of dry, hard dirt—you look at it, size it up, watch as the family weeps with gratitude and amazement at what you have created with your own hands—and you find yourself saying, "That is very good!" (Of course, this year, when I looked at the "Door from Hell" that took me seven hours to hang... I had other words that came to mind!) But when we do that—when we express pride in our hard work—we are only following the example of the God himself who declared of His own work, "That is very good!"

It is important to understand how unique is the Bible's perspective on work. Creation doesn't occur because of a conflict between competing gods. There are no gods to compete with Yahweh. And creation isn't a result of something that had to be done. Creation was the intentional work of God, and He didn't have to work... He wanted to work. He wanted to create. He wanted to organize and arrange—and when He was done, he enjoyed standing back and admiring his handiwork. God created—God worked—for the sheer delight of it.

If we are going to have a healthy view of work, this is foundational: We have a God who works... a blue collar god! He is hard at work in, delighting in his divine labors. But if it's not clear enough by the end of chapter 1, chapter 2 (today's text) shouts it out. Chapter 2 focuses on the creation of man. And notice how God creates man. Every other act of creation was by fiat—spoken—but here, our blue collar God gets his hands dirty. ⁶⁷ "...the Lord God formed the man from the dust of the ground..." You have an image of Almighty God playing in the mud, but when Yahweh makes mud pies something special happens! Our blue collar God is getting dirt under his fingernails, and he's having fun doing it!

But he's not done getting physical! After he forms this lifeless body, we read that God "...breathed into his nostrils the breath of life." Mouth to mouth... it wouldn't be "re-suscitation" would it? It would be mouth to mouth "suscitation!" God uses his lips to breathe His Spirit into the lips of the earthen shell he created with his hands and produces his greatest creation—and he has a ball doing it! It's like Nick Nesland in our church. He owns a hydraulic repair company; he pays guys to do that work, but he cannot resist pulling out his tools and tinkering with things himself... because it delights him.

The unique view of the Bible is that work is good! We have a blue collar God who delights in hard work. And God the Father is not the only hard-working member of the Trinity. When God came to earth as a man, he took a career, didn't he? The

gospels speak mostly of the last three years of Jesus' life. But we know that he lived until he was 33, which means that for about half his life—before he began his preaching ministry—Jesus had another job. We get a hint from Matthew's gospel. 13:53-57:

"When Jesus had finished [teaching] these parables, he moved on from there. Coming to his hometown, he began teaching the people in their synagogue, and they were amazed. "Where did this man get this wisdom and these miraculous powers?" they asked. "Isn't this the carpenter's son? Isn't his mother's name Mary, and aren't his brothers James, Joseph, Simon and Judas? Aren't all his sisters with us? Where then did this man get all these things?" And they took offense at him."

Why were the residents of Jesus' hometown amazed and offended at his teaching and miracles? Because to them, he wasn't Jesus the prophet or Jesus the Messiah, —he was Jesus the carpenter's son, which meant he was a carpenter, too! Boys usually apprenticed into their father's vocation. The word "carpenter" is "tekton"... a word that also means "builder." It is likely that Jesus was more of a contractor than just a carpenter. He built with wood, with stone, with metal. He might have built plows and furniture, but it is just as likely that some of the homes in Nazareth were built by Jesus.

In other words, Jesus was a small business owner for 15 or 20 years before he ever started his second career as Savior of the World. He worked with other sub-contractors, negotiated bids, purchased supplies, and oversaw projects... which makes you wonder, what must it have been like to own a plow built by Jesus, to sleep in a bed built by Jesus. Or when Jesus told his disciples, "In my Father's house are many rooms, and I go to prepare one for you..." can you imagine what a room, custom-built by Jesus, must be like?

God the Father is a blue collar god. So is God the Son. His hands rough; his fingers scarred from splinters and hammer misses and saw blades. And even God the Holy Spirit is portrayed in the Bible as a worker. In Genesis 1.2, the Spirit "hovers" over the earth in creation... the same word for a hen sitting on her eggs! In Exodus, the Holy Spirit fills Bezalel with skill and ability in all kinds of crafts: gold and silver and bronze work and masonry. And in the New Testament, the Holy Spirit is called "Paraclete" ...which means "helper." Our God—the God of the universe, the God of all creation, the God of our redemption—is a working God. He chooses to work. For God, work is not a necessary evil. It is not a punishment. It is a delight and it is holy.

If we are going to have a healthy, balanced, God-honoring view of our own work life, this is our starting point! Our God is a working God. Work is a part of the blessing of creation. Work is intended to be life-giving and delightful. Work can be holy, and work can be worship! When we understand this, it transforms our view

of our own work. It breaks down that Sunday/Monday divide. And it can instill in you a sense of pride in the call that God has upon you in your workweek.

I'm afraid the church—starting with us clergy—has been largely responsible for conveying a false notion: that the real call of God is a call to professional Christian ministry. If you are a pastor or a missionary or a youth worker in the church, well that's a call of God. But if you are an engineer or a teacher or a plumber or a sales clerk or a barista, well that's just a job. It pays the bills, it provides money for you to support your church (and the real ministry that is going on there), but at best it is a secondary type of calling. This [pointing to self]... this is the big time. This is the real thing. This is a spiritual calling.

I don't know if I've ever conveyed that; I might have. But I don't believe it. I've never believed it. But it seems more important than ever to dispel that notion and empower you all to believe that God calls his people to every kind of profession—not as a backup plan because you couldn't cut it in the real spiritual calling—but because God loves and calls and equips engineers and teachers and plumbers and sales clerks and baristas to be his servants in those capacities for the advancement of his kingdom. If I've led you to believe otherwise, forgive me. But over these coming weeks, we are going to clear that up.

And this is our starting point. Our work and our worship need not be at odds, as my business friend put it, because we have a God who worked. And by the way, that work didn't end when creation was done. Jesus told his disciples in John 5:17, "My Father is ALWAYS at his work to this very day, and I, too, am working.... The very work that the Father has given me to finish... I am doing."

This morning, we are especially reminded of how Jesus finished his work. That work took him all the way to the cross. The work of Jesus was, literally, blood, sweat and tears. It was hard work. He was unappreciated. He was abused. He was killed. But he finished his work... the work of our redemption.

Christ gave his life to save yours... to redeem yours. Christ gave his life to break down the artificial boundaries that exist between Sunday and Monday. Christ worked himself to death... to give you life! And to give eternal meaning to the work that you do as a mother and a doctor and a student and an electrician and a musician and a waitress and a pilot. And this morning, as we come to the table of the Lord, we are reminded again of just how hard our God worked to save our lives. If you are grateful for his labor—his labor of love—I invite you to partake of this meal.

Sermon Questions

- REFLECT & APPLY TOGETHER: Share your thoughts. Don't teach! Listen and reflect on God's word together; grapple with what God is calling us to do and be through this passage.
- PRAY TOGETHER: Tell the Lord one thing you are thankful for, and lay one concern before the Lord.
- DIG DEEPER
 1. What does the phrase "Blue Collar God" imply?
 2. What do we learn about God's view of work from the creation accounts?
How does this view differ with your own view of work? From other world views?
 3. How does this Biblical understanding of work speak to your OWN vocation?