

work is intended to be a participation in God's work. As we prayerfully imagine God's first "workweek," we get a feel for what is involved.

God makes light. What a gift. God's work. God's gift. We can see what is going on, we can see where we are going. "Light dawns for the righteous" (Ps. 97:11). Every lamp, every candle, every torch, every chandelier is a witness to what is continuously revealed around us.

God makes sky. Sheer gift. God's work. God's gift. This huge Above. Space and spaciousness, this immense Beyond. Far, far more than we can take in. Far, far more than we can control. Everything visible stretching into invisibility.

God makes earth and sea, plants and trees. Sheer gift. God's work. God's gift. Oak forests and wheat fields, apple trees and rose gardens. A place to stand. A place to be at home. A home furnished with what we need. A home beautiful.

God makes sun and moon and stars, marking seasons and days and years. Sheer gift. God's work. God's gift. Time to look around and see the sights, sunrise and sunset. Time to listen to the wind in the willows and the rain on the roof. Time to sleep and dream and "awake the dawn" (Ps. 108:2). Time to remember and count blessings. Time to hope and pray.

God makes fish and birds. Sea and sky resplendent with life. Sheer gift. God's work. God's gift. Rainbow trout and belted kingfishers. The dazzle and elegance of every kind of life.

God makes animals domestic and wild. Sheer gift. God's work. God's gift. Cattle and caribou, ants and lizards, grizzly bears and honeybees. Life on the move. Life profuse in form and color. Life dancing.

God makes man and woman. Sheer gift. God's work. God's gift. Wherever you look, wherever you go, man and woman. Man and woman on every street and road, each one unique. But on this sixth day of work, there is something different. Each man and woman is not only an instance of God's workmanship but is capable of participating in God's work, working in God's workplace and continuing God's work, continuing the gift-making.

And then it is done, complete, "finished." The seventh day, a day for God to look back across the workweek, take stock of "all the work

that he had done." "The work that he had done" is repeated three times (Gen. 2:2-3). A day of rest. A day for quiet reflection on all the good work. A day of hallowing and blessing the good work.

Seven times in this week of work, God paused, looked over his work, and pronounced it good. The final "good" was intensified to "very good." Good work, indeed.

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A week of work. A week of gifts. All work at its heart and origin gives form to a gift. Or, to put it another way, it is the nature of work to provide a container for a gift. The reason that work is called good is that it is the means for delivering a gift.

To call something or someone a gift does not tell us what it is but how it comes to us. "Gift," as such, has no shape or color or texture. "Gift" merely says that it comes to us freely. It arrives neither out of necessity nor on demand. It is free. It arrives in an ambience of generosity, with no strings attached.

A prayed attentiveness to the workweek of creation develops within us a realization that we live in a world of sheer gift, that we ourselves are sheer gift, and that whatever we do replicates and continues to express and give form to this basic giftedness — *God-giftedness*. And we receive this gift in the form of works.

The most common term in our biblical languages for this underlying and comprehensive God-giftedness is "grace." And Genesis, with the emphasis provided by the repetitions across the seven creation days of God at work — "Let there be" (12x), "made" (3x), "created" (5x), "work" (3x) — dramatically underscores that it is the nature of work to provide a material form for the invisibilities of grace.

Works as a Form for Glory

The mature Christian life involves a congruence of grace and work. Nothing in the Christian life matures apart from work and works. The

invisible Word that was in the Genesis beginning (John 1:1) “became flesh” in Jesus. In Jesus, a human form “full of grace” (1:14), we see God at work (“the works that the Father has given me to complete,” 5:36). Jesus insists that the God no one has ever seen (1:18) is visible in the works that Jesus himself does right in front of their eyes. “The works that I do,” Jesus said, “testify to me” (10:25).

It is one of the great ironies of Jesus’ life that what people saw Jesus do — Jesus at work feeding the hungry on a hillside, Jesus in their neighborhood, Jesus reaching out to the marginal, Jesus healing a “mother-in-law” and a twelve-year-old child (both unnamed) in the houses they lived in, Jesus reading familiar Scriptures in the synagogues where they worshiped each Sabbath — were the very things that provoked criticism and mistrust and outright rejection of him as the incarnation of God. His contemporaries found it far easier to believe in an invisible God than in a visible God.

Jesus’ work is the form in which the invisible God can be seen. The fourth Gospel, John, puts it succinctly: we have seen God’s glory in Jesus. Glory is God’s invisibility become visible in Jesus at work. And — this is Paul’s point in Ephesians — we also are “created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand to be our way of life” (Eph. 2:10). Our work is a form for the glory.

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It is essential that we assimilate God’s Genesis week of work if we are to live what “God prepared beforehand to be our way of life.” The Genesis week is the story of God pouring all the Trinitarian invisibilities into forms that are accessible to our five senses. God’s grace, the basic giftedness of everything that God is and does, becomes present to us exclusively in the form of work. The works of God — light and sky, earth and sea, trees and vegetation, time and seasons, fish and birds, cattle and kangaroos, man and woman — are the forms by which we see, hear, touch, taste, and smell grace. The works of creation, including we ourselves as part of those works, provide the forms by which we enter into and participate in the world of grace.

The visible creation is the form, the context, in which we experience grace. Invisible grace permeates the forms of creation, filling them with content. The Genesis gift-work of creation becomes visible and audible in the forms of creation. Creation is all gift. We receive the gift and participate in the gift in the forms of work. Salvation is all gift. It takes form in a world of work.

A meditative understanding of Genesis forms us in continuity with the Genesis works that God pronounced good and very good. Formed in submission and obedience by Genesis rhythms and images, we mature into a life of “good works, which God prepared beforehand to be our way of life.” These Genesis rhythms and images free us from secularized and pietist distortions that result from pitting grace and work against one another. Good work and good works are to grace what a pail is to water: a container to get it from the well to the supper table. God’s grace is the content. Our work (after the manner of Jesus) is the container.

We are not angels. This world that we inhabit is God’s work. Everything we experience we experience under God’s sky and on God’s earth and sea, in God’s time marked by sun, moon, and stars, in the company of God’s menagerie of dolphins and eagles, lions and lambs, and in the company of image-of-God men and women who come to us as parents and grandparents, children and grandchildren, brothers and sisters, neighbors and relatives, playmates and workmates, students and helpers — and Jesus. Nothing in the practice of resurrection is experienced or participated in apart from a body, a form, fingers and feet, eyes and ears and tongue. And nothing in the practice of resurrection takes place apart from stuff to work with — dirt and clay for shaping pots and mugs, stone and timbers for constructing homes and churches, nouns and verbs for conveying wisdom and knowledge, cotton and wool for weaving clothes and blankets, semen and eggs for making babies: good works. Work is the generic form for embodying grace. All Christian spirituality is thoroughly incarnational — in Jesus, to be sure, but also in us.

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