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CHRIST IN MY WORKSHOP Michael B. Beaugh
I Corinthians 3:10-15 May 17, 2009
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I have been sharing how Christ knocked on my door recently. I invited him inside. He wanted to see each room in my heart and in my home. After visiting several rooms, he asked me if I had any tools. He said he wanted to see my workshop.

As we walked into the shop, I told Christ that I have been a builder all my life. I came by it naturally from my father who could build almost anything. At least, that is what I thought. I always admired his skill. More than once he invited me to join him in a project. He taught me how to use tools. He gave me helpful hints, for example, about how to cut a straight line or drive a nail without bending it. He also tried to teach me to respect his tools by putting them back where I found them. That was a lesson I never really learned.

Christ seemed to listen as I talked. Then he suddenly made a loud noise. I realized he was taking a big and noisy sniff. I wondered if I had forgotten to use deodorant that morning and sniffed under my armpits. He said, "It's not you. I just love the smell of fresh sawdust. It always reminds me of my own father's workshop. He was a carpenter, you know." Christ took another big sniff as he looked around. A sadness came over him when he said, "But I don't smell any fresh sawdust in your workshop."

I said, "Lord, I have been really too busy to build much lately." I walked over and pulled out a photo. "But let me show you something I am really proud of. Here is a 25' sailboat I built about 25 years ago. It is my pride and joy. I actually had some help from my father and some friends."

Christ took the picture from me and held it out as he looked it. He said, "I am impressed. Is this you in the picture?" I acknowledged that it was me. He said, "You looked so young then." I replied, "I was only a baby when I built that boat." We both laughed and it felt good to laugh with Christ.

He said, "I know the amount of work you put into it. I watched you build it. It took you six years." He took the frame and walked over and put it back on the shelf and turned to me, and said, "You said you have been too busy to build much lately, right?"

I began to explain all the demands on my time and the cost of building things. "Lord, I have a job to do and a family to rear. I come into my workshop sometimes to repair things, but I just don't have time to build things like I used to."

Christ picked up a board lying on a wood pile and sighted along the edge as if to check its straightness. He aimed the board right at me, or so it seemed. He said, "It's not really a matter of time, is it?"

I said, "What do you mean? If you only knew ..." I caught myself. "Of course you know. I would be in this workshop if I had the time. And better tools would help too. I have always told my wife that if I had the right tools, I could build anything."

Christ continued to look down the edge of the board at me. "Actually, I have given you all the tools you need to build what I want you to build." I reacted like you do sometimes when someone says something totally unbelievable to your face. I blinked in disbelief at his lack of compassion and understanding for my busy life.

He put the board down and picked up a hammer. He swung it as if checking its weight and balance. "Nice hammer," he said. "What do you use this for? Hanging pictures?" I was learning that Christ can be sarcastic sometimes.

Actually, I didn't know what to say since that was about all I had been using my hammer for. He put the hammer down and walked over to look under the orange tarp. He said, "Guess you don't use this much" as he lifted the cover off my table saw. On the top were lying all the parts and pieces in a jumbled array. What he said next sent my head spinning. He said, "You may not have time to come into this workshop, but you are building things all the time. **You're just not building the things I want you to build.**"

My heart sank. Nothing hurts quite as much as knowing that Christ is displeased with me. That's probably why I avoid the Bible passages that talk about judgment. I want to believe that Christ is pleased with my efforts and is so kind that he wouldn't say an unkind word to hurt a flea. I am counting on him to grade on the curve, if you know what I mean. All of this was running through my mind as Christ began tinkering with my table saw.

"You know," he said, "each of you earth-beings must 'choose with care' how to build your life. I like the way my servant Paul said that. I put it in the blueprint you call the Bible. Paul always came right to the point, didn't he?" Christ began putting the table saw pieces in place as if he were getting ready to cut something. "Paul told my servants in Corinth that 'the work of each builder will become visible' at the last Day, 'and the fire will test what sort of work each has done.' Do you believe that?"

What was I to say? I nodded but not too vigorously. Christ continued. "Do you remember what else Paul said?"

I realized too late how smart alecky it sounded when I replied, "That women shouldn't speak in church?"

Have you ever seen Christ roll his eyes at you? I got the big eye roll thing before he said, "Paul called himself a 'skilled master builder' who laid a foundation on which each earth-being must build his or her life. He correctly said that I am the foundation on which others must build. You, on the other hand, have been building lots of stuff, just not on the foundation I have provided for you. **It is like you have been trying to build your life on a foundation of sand.**"

I suddenly felt like I was being pushed to the wall. It is often my natural instinct to defend myself. I can justify myself with the best of them. In this case, I decided to mount a theological argument in my defense. "Lord," I said, "Paul also told us that we are saved by grace, and not by works. All we have to do is believe in you, and we have a one way ticket to heaven. Don't *you* believe that?" I couldn't believe I was talking like that to Christ.

Seemingly unfazed by my outburst, he picked up my level, held it up, and said, "Paul is always on the level." (I thought it was a bad joke.) Then he tilted the level. I watched the bubble move off center as he said, But you are still a bit off the bubble. The foundation I have laid is the free gift of salvation. "It is the way we, my Father in heaven and I, planned it from the beginning. We created you earth-beings with the freedom to decide how you will live your life, what you will do with it, what you will build. We gave you the blueprints and gave you the tools, but left you a lot of room to be creative. We knew it was a risk, but we were willing to take it because we wanted you in your freedom to choose to love us. We knew this freedom would be costly. We knew it would take my sacrifice on the cross to win your love and to clear away the guilt and barriers that keep you from building the life we have always planned for you. I counted the cost of that foundation and accepted the price. It cost me my life."

I started in again, "Yes, Lord, but . . ." I stopped in mid-sentence as I saw the look on his face. Divine sadness. I looked down at his hands and saw the scars and decided to keep quiet.

But my heart raced wildly as I felt the judgment of Christ piercing my soul. Anger took over. I am not a bad person, I thought to myself. I have done lots of good things. Doesn't he appreciate all that I have done for him? The years I have gone to church. The number of meetings I have endured. The people I have had to put up with. The money I have given. Doesn't any of this count? And where was he when my wife battled cancer and my mother died too young from heart failure and my father went crazy with Alzheimer's disease in his last years?

I could feel my face turning red. I noticed I was clenching my hands into fists. Christ noticed too. He said, with a lightness that caught me off-guard, "See what I mean?"

He reached over and took my hands in his. "You can't do much worthwhile building with clenched fists. **Clenched fists are almost always a sign that you are trying to build on the sand of your own ambitions and desires.** When the storms come, your house gets washed away. Your building projects collapse."

As he spoke, I felt my hands relaxing in his. My racing heart began to quiet down. Finally, I said with some conviction, "Lord, I am ready to build something." I tried to pull my hands free from his, but he didn't let go. Instead he said, "No, you're not ready to build anything yet."

That totally confused me, kind of like the doctrine of predestination and the theory of relativity. "But, Lord, I thought you wanted me to get busy in my workshop. Let go and I will get to work."

He just kept holding on. I felt silly standing in my workshop holding hands with Christ. I prayed no one would come in and see us like that. Oops, too late! He heard my prayer.

"See what I mean?" he said. Sounded like a broken record to me, but I said, "Not exactly."

"You are not ready to build anything worthwhile until you are ready to let me hold your hands. With your hands in mine, you can build skyscrapers of love. You can build a castle of genuine hospitality where no one is a stranger, not even your wife or children. You can build bridges over troubled water. You can build a career of meaningful service. You can build a citadel of hope against which not even the powers of evil can prevail. You can build a cathedral of praise that showers parched souls with eternal joy."

I couldn't resist asking, "Are you telling me, Lord, that my life could be perfect?"

"No, I am telling you that you have far more potential than you realize. That's really why you haven't spent much time in your workshop. You have realized that you don't have much more to give because so much of your giving and your building has been about you. You have reached the end of the line. At your age, that is a sad state of affairs. Now I am telling you that you have so much more building to do, so much more to give. You have the tools. But it's simply not going to happen until you let me in. Not until you let me hold your hands. Is this what you want?"

I fell to my knees. Visions of skyscrapers of love and a castle of hospitality and bridges over troubled water filled my heart and mind. I saw myself with humility presenting to my Father in heaven the things he had helped me make of my life. I saw my family and friends and even strangers whose lives I had impacted surrounding me like a great crowd of witnesses.

And I heard a voice like the sound of thunder. "Is this what you want to make of your life?" And I cried out to the Voice, "Yes, that is what I want." "Are you willing to pay the price?" I cried again, "Yes, Lord, I want what you want. I want to do what you want me to do." I heard a great cheer go up from heaven.

I felt a tug on my arm. Christ was lifting me to my feet. He said, "I can't wait to smell the fresh sawdust in your workshop." I thought we were getting ready to build something. Instead, he said, "Let's go see your game room. You do play games, don't you?" I couldn't wait to see where this was going. But I'll tell you about that next week.