

The Dovetail of Holy Carpentry
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I grew up in a house substantially built by my sainted father. He was a self-made carpenter and handyman, having learned from his machinist father. Although as a boy I probably was a pest, constantly underfoot with too many questions, it was fascinating to watch him choose lumber and hardware and turn them into a garage or family room. Although I did *not* inherit his carpentry skills, I did develop an understanding and appreciation for the gifts he called on to fashion what was needed for our family. Part of that still echoes in the joy I find watching Antiques Roadshow, This Ol' House, the Furniture Guys, and the like. Seeing early American furniture authorities Leigh and Leslie Keno unfold the mysteries of woodgrain, finishes, and dovetail joints for flabbergasted owners of unrecognized treasures, one begins to realize that honest craftsmanship can quickly transcend itself into art.

Jesus himself was an apprenticed carpenter if Mark's Gospel is to be believed: *Is this not the carpenter, the son of Mary* [Mark 6:3]? While Matthew identifies Joseph as the carpenter in the family [Matthew 13:54-56], sons were usually expected to learn their fathers' trade. Moreover, the people who watched Jesus grow and mature assumed him to be a tradesman, a *tekton* in Greek, meaning one who worked with his hands. Thus, his embrace of a rabbi's work as he began his ministry puzzled folks who would rather keep the lowly workman in his place. How can a mere laborer speak "...as one with authority?" Jesus' parents already were befuddled; Jesus' matching wits with the temple scholars when he was twelve only added to the things Mary would ponder. By the time he attends a wedding reception at Cana with a poorly stocked bar, Mary suspects his gifts and capabilities are rare, indeed. Sunday's gospel, John 2:1-11, sketches out the details of this Wedding at Cana of Galilee. Jesus is called by his mother to ensure that what is lacking in the bridal couple's wedding feast would not put them to shame. Jesus transforms ordinary water into wine of a rare vintage, the first of his wondrous signs throughout his ministry.

It is comforting to suspect that the one who could act as a hospitable bartender, who could feed four to five thousand on a budget, who could stretch forth his worker's hands to heal or release others from horrid burdens, was trained early on to know what a dovetail join is and probably even make one. Dovetail joinery is skilled work. Some forms of dovetail are the mark of the best furniture design and construction in general. The join in effect weaves together two pieces of wood able to be slotted together by a comb of intricate cuts. Some of the best joins are invisible to casual inspection. Where does one piece end and the other begin in such work?

The church has entered now a period called the Post-Epiphany season. It is one of several seasons of the Church Year which are a dovetailing of what once was and what will be. Advent recalls centuries of longing for the Messiah of God; the prophets foretold wondrous events, a virgin and child, one who would suffer and redeem God's people. Christmas, another such dovetail of time, embraces that ancient longing for God's Anointed. Isaiah's words bring a piece of ancient lumber to the join – *For unto us a child is born...* - slotting it into the heaven-rending song of angelic hosts – *Glory to God in highest heaven, and on earth peace...*! Yet this wondrous meeting of the ancient with the new remained for a time unknown. Epiphany celebrates the world's growing recognition, based on a Greek term meaning "public manifestation." Epiphany, then, is

a dovetailing move from the hidden ways of God into public witness to God's holy work. Jesus the carpenter's son becomes known as Rabbi, Good Shepherd, Word, Teacher, the Messiah of God. Easter itself is the primal dovetail join of God's work. In three days of cosmic struggle, God in Christ conquers sin, death, and the grave. He ushers in the reality of God's eternal Kingdom as the stone is rolled away from a tomb which could not ever contain Jesus the carpenter. The last major dovetail join in God's unfolding of time is the festival of Pentecost. The fifty days of Easter celebration end, but it also begins the life of God's holy people as the Church. *So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new* [II Corinthians 5:17]! Our mission, until God's in-gathering is fulfilled and we behold the many dwelling places in God's house [John 14:1-7], is to witness by announcing and embodying God's good news. Perhaps we can borrow from the ELCA project, *God's Work – Our Hands*. *Our Work* is to show forth the saving skill of *Jesus the carpenter's Hands*. That just about hits the proverbial nail on the head!