

Introduction
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God spat. At first glance such an assertion might sound irreverent, even dangerously blasphemous. How dare I attribute such a disgusting act to the Divine! Yet in my mind I am following the lead of the Gospels, at least if we see the actions of Jesus as not only the ministry of a carpenter from Nazareth but also as the workings of the One who is God. If that is the case—and orthodox Christianity would affirm Christ as both fully divine and fully human—then the stories that record Jesus’ tangible dealings with us speak of God’s tangible dealings with us. What happened when God decided to become one of us? There was saving grace in all its tactile forms. The One through whom the waters were made released moisture from his mouth to heal. God, in Christ Jesus, spat, and the blind received their sight (Mark 8:22-25; John 9:1-7) and those with troubled tongues spoke plainly (Mark 7:32-35).

Ptuo is the Greek verb used in these Scriptures. (I have transliterated the verb into English.) Just saying the word, one can almost hear the sound of Jesus’ action, the moisture coming from his mouth. You should hear earthiness in the word. When God assumed our human nature, it involved more than nice concepts and other ephemeral things. When God dwelt among us as one of us, Jesus tangibly laid his hands on people, breathed on them, fed them, had power come out from his body, bled, died, rose again—and even spat. Think of all the biblical stories where people had physical contact with Jesus Christ or where the body of Christ plays an important role. When God became Incarnate, it was a concrete affair. For the recipients of Jesus’ saving actions, all the human senses—touch, taste, smell, hearing, and sight—came into play. The body of Jesus Christ became the meeting ground for humanity and God.

But what about now? If contacting the presence of the saving God was a tactile thing during the earthly ministry of Christ, has his Ascension to heaven robbed us of the opportunity to experience God's presence in this way? Since Jesus Christ seems to be no longer bodily present in this world, how can people now experience the grace he once offered? One answer is that things are radically different now: saving grace and encounters with God have moved solely into the intangible and internal realm. In this view, we should no longer expect to experience God's presence in any palpable way. The problem is that we still have our tactile human nature, which Jesus kept, too, in his Resurrection. (Have you ever noticed how much touching and eating he does in his Resurrection appearances? What a Savior! The resurrected Lord of the cosmos is found cooking breakfast on a beach [John 21].)

Another solution is to say that such tangible contact with God's presence—meeting God in the body of Christ—is still possible. That will be this book's suggestion, namely, that the worship of an assembled church of Christians is where we can still experience the presence of God through Jesus Christ in the sensible realm. The theological premise is that God's assumption and elevation of our human nature, including all of its tactility, in Christ's Nativity and Resurrection should impact how we think about and engage in Christian worship. The Incarnation and the Resurrection launched a certain trajectory for Christian worship. In Christ all the fullness of God lives in bodily form (Colossians 2:9). It should be no surprise that we experience the presence of God through Christ when the church, which is the Body of Christ, worships in the power of the Holy Spirit.

God in Jesus Christ still spits, touches, breathes, speaks, and feeds. It is just that now we call it “worship.” We need to be weaned from the notion that worship is merely *our* activity. How meager and boring. There is much greater opportunity to encounter God if we see it—as Don Saliers, one of my professors, used to say—as the ongoing song and dance of the Incarnate God, Jesus Christ. The meeting ground between God and humanity has stayed the same since the Ascension. This book’s goal is to explore the implications of this notion for planning, conducting, and understanding worship.