

2019 05 05 – Seeing with New Eyes

Acts 9:1-20

The theme for today's service is creativity. You've already been introduced to Sue Bland, the artist who has joined us this weekend to share her gifts, her love of nature, her enthusiasm and some her creative practices. We are thrilled to have Sue with us and I loved watching her play with the children earlier in the service. We all still have an opportunity to spend time with Sue this afternoon in her final PLAYshop.

But let's start at the beginning. First of all, how many of you would call yourselves "creative"? Be honest, when you think of words that describe who you are in the world, is "creative" one of them? (*wait for hands to go up*) Some hands went up, but many didn't. You may have noticed that my hand didn't go up either. I have to confess that I have never seen "creativity" as one of my gifts. In fact, the word, "creativity" still has the ability to create high levels of anxiety in my body, in my heart and in my mind. It probably started in elementary school when my grade in Art Class was always less than all my other marks. To me it was a clear indication that creativity was not my thing. I still don't see myself as an artist. So, those of you who didn't put your hand up... I understand your hesitation. I understand the fear and anxiety that that word can conjure up.

But creativity is not just about art. If we go back to the Latin root of the word we realize that creativity is about creation itself. It is about creating something new. It is about "coming forth," "springing up," or "growing." So let's go back to my first

question and this time I will ask it in a different way. How many of you have ever created something new? How many of you have ever grown something new? How many of you have ever built something new? (*wait for hands to go up – it should be everyone*). Every single hand should be raised –we have all created something. Each time we prepare a meal, each time we build a business, each time we plant a garden, each time we do a craft, each time we decide what we are going to wear in the morning, we create something new. Our days are full of creative acts.

So why do we not recognize ourselves as creative beings? Why do we stifle the creativity that exists within us? I've already shared my own story and I know that most of my anxiety is connected to a fear of failure, a fear that whatever I create will not be good enough. Each person struggles with their own fears around creativity. Matthew Fox, a former Roman Catholic priest, wrote a book that included a whole list of reasons why people struggle to be their innate creative selves. This list includes

1. A need to control and put control first.
2. Difficulty of surrendering
3. Workaholism
4. Too little time
5. My very busy mind
6. Fear of being alone, of rocking the boat (*Creativity*, pages 121-123)
7. The fear of Bigness – mine and God's – that I might encounter if I really let my creativity express itself.

One of our realities is that when we create something it usually means that something else needs to die, or be let go of. In order to create a new career we will have to let go of the job we already have. In order to plant a new garden we have to dig out the one that was there before; in order to create a new wardrobe we have to make room in our closets; in order to bring up a child we have to make room in our lives for new responsibilities. Letting go is hard... there are so many reasons to be afraid of creativity and the creation of new life.

Saul is definitely afraid. Saul is a Jewish scholar, a leader among his people. He follows the Jewish laws as carefully as he can and he is angry and afraid because there are a group of people within his faith who have decided to follow a different set of rules. These people have decided to follow the teachings of a man called Jesus and they have called themselves, "followers of the Way." Saul is afraid that the "followers of the Way" are going to create something new, something that will threaten his understanding of what it means to be Jewish. His fear of this new life within his religion is so great that Saul has made it his purpose to round up all these trouble makers and bring them to Jerusalem where they can be punished, and hopefully, silenced.

In today's scripture reading Saul is traveling to a place called Damascus where he plans to arrest Jesus' disciples. But while he is on the road, a light flashes from the sky and he falls to the ground. Then Saul hears the voice of the risen Christ and when he gets up he realizes he is blind. For three days he is in darkness until Ananias, one of the followers of the Way, lays hands on him and when the "scales" fall from his eyes Saul is able to see again.

But it is obvious something more than just his sight has changed because Saul is immediately baptized and soon he too is preaching Jesus' new Way of love, peace and justice for all. Instead of persecuting the followers of the Way, Saul becomes one of them. Instead of being afraid of this new life springing up within the Jewish religion he is now actively growing it. Instead of trying to destroy it, Saul is now a co-creator of what will eventually be called the Christian church.

So what is it that allows Saul to get past his fear and to embrace this act of creativity? What do you think? Is it the flashing light, the disembodied voice or Ananias' healing hands? (*wait and see if anyone responds*) I believe that Saul's heart is changed because of the presence of the Holy Mystery, the Spirit of God, the risen Christ, in all those acts. And, I believe, that the 3 days of darkness, that time of emptiness that Saul experienced in Damascus is also a key ingredient in his conversion, in his re-birth, in his experience of re-creation.

Creativity is not possible unless we stop the craziness of our lives long enough to be present with the both the joy and the pain that is in us and around us in each moment. Sometimes, like Saul, we have dark or empty periods forced upon us, by loss, or illness or depression. They are both a curse and a gift, they are usually very painful and it is in those times that we stop long enough to listen to the Spirit and to just "be" in the midst of God's creation.

But we don't have to wait for something to happen to us. We don't have to wait for a time of darkness or emptiness. We can take time for the Spirit in our everyday lives. We can take time to meditate, to walk in nature, to pray, to play,

to learn new things, to say thank you, to sing, to connect more deeply with ourselves and with each other. I'm going to say that again. We can take time to meditate, to walk in nature, to pray, to play, to learn new things, to say thank you, to sing, to connect more deeply with ourselves and with each other.

With each one of these practices we open a space within ourselves for the Creative Spirit to enter. With each of these practices we, like Saul, are able to see the world around us with new eyes of wonder and joy. With each of these practices we are able to find, to honour and to live out the God-given creativity that is within each one of us.