

## **Sermon: 'Being Creative'**

Silvia Purdie. Cashmere Presbyterian Church, Sunday 13 March 2016,  
Harvest Festival

Isaiah 43:16-21

Revelation 21:1-7

First question for you: *at school, are you better at copying something correctly, or coming up with your own ideas?*

*Which do you get more rewarded for?*

We start out, Year 1, learning to write ... the letter 'a' ('a is for apple') ... we have to copy it correctly. The teacher is just not interested in you coming up with a creative new and exciting way to write the letter 'a'.

And much of our schooling is about copying things down and writing them out correctly – hands up if you remember school that way? ... which trains us to be good little computers, able to 'copy and paste'.

But then the expectations change, and in secondary school and university it is no longer OK to just click 'copy and paste'. This is called 'plagiarism' and punished. Teachers start asking of you something else, something called creative thinking. Teachers start being interested in what you think about things. To do well ('excellence') you need to have fresh insights, ask interesting questions, think outside the square.

It's not just in writing either. In Year 1 art you might be asked to draw an apple and if what you draw looks a bit like an apple that's great! But by Year 13 no one will be interested in how well you can copy an apple, or someone else's drawing of an apple. They will want you to allow others to experience that apple in a new way, to bring something fresh to apple-ness ... to be creative.

We all know that we need creativity in our world. We all know that our systems and technologies are ruining our environment, affecting everything from genetic engineering (including apples), to the soil, the air, even the heat of the sun. And we know that the problems of the future cannot be solved by the solutions of the present. We need creativity, we need innovation.

But how do we encourage creativity? How do we think fresh? How do we ask new questions, see things in new ways?

I love it that the Bible describes God as being creative ... our readings today have God saying "I am doing a New Thing!" Watch out for it, I am remaking the world. We all know that God made the world, but we also need to remember that he is also remaking it, restoring it, reworking it. God is the ultimate creative force.

And God is at work in you and me. These are the Big Ideas of the Christian church

- 1) God made everything
- 2) God made me, and you
- 3) God is making more stuff happen through me, and you, and us

So let's talk a bit about how we can be creative. Because copying stuff that someone else already did is easy, and a bit boring, don't you think? I find it far more interesting to make up something new, or see how we can take what we have been given and make it more lovely or useful.

I'll show you how it works in practice. When I learned to play the piano I had to learn scales and arpeggios. I had to copy my teacher exactly and do it over and over again until my fingers could do them without me even having to look.

Tim, can you play us an arpeggio please?

But sometimes, you might make a mistake ... Tim can you play an arpeggio with a mistake in it please? (do you think Tim ever makes mistakes?!)

Now, at that moment, Tim has a choice. If he is just trying to get his arpeggios correct, he will get rid of the mistake. But maybe, if he has some spare time, and maybe if he feels like mucking around for a while, he might get interested in that mistake.

Can you play the mistake again, Tim?

Then, he might decide to start getting creative ... and this is how creativity works. He might decide that he is curious about that odd note, and he might ask himself, I wonder what would happen if ...?

Go on, Tim, follow that odd note and see where it might lead you ... play around with it ... Do you like it? Was it interesting? If Tim liked it he might work on it, turn it into a fresh thing, and that is composition, an entirely new creation, that came miraculously out of nowhere. Tim just happens to be one of the best improvisational pianists in the country, so it comes naturally to him.

*What helps you to be creative?*

So, let's talk about the creative process. And now things get interesting because the rules for creativity are different than for normal life. So we discover that being creative is actually about paradox ... a paradox is when 2 things that contradict each other are both true. Opposite ideas that need each other.

Creativity: 2 paradoxes:

**To be creative I must LOOK and LISTEN,  
TOUCH and TASTE talk to people and collect ideas**

My friend Lynn was a very creative person, an artist with colours and fabrics. After she died I went through all her boxes and boxes of papers and found all the things that she had collected and kept through the years. When she saw an add in the magazine that tickled her fancy she would cut it out and keep it. And she would take photos of things that other people would walk right past and something in that would inspire her. Being creative is about SEEING things. And it is about getting ideas and inspiration from people and bits of music and interesting words and the shape of a building

*Tell the person next to you ... what things do you notice that inspire you?*

God gives us eyes to see and faith is a way of seeing. God gives us ears to hear and faith is a way of listening. And God's spirit works between people bringing people together into friendship with each other, and God's spirit is in those conversations that energise you.

**To be creative I must have SPACE and be alone**

See what I mean? This is a paradox. This is completely the opposite to that one. To be creative I need to go away from people and noise and clutter and have silence and in that solitude ideas come and work comes out of me.

*Tell the person next to you ... do you like to be alone?*

This reminds us of the very beginning, when God made the heavens and the earth. 'The earth was a formless void'. A dark nothingness. And the wind of God hovered over the face of the deep. And God said "Let there be light". Genesis 1 verse 2

Out of nothing God created. And I don't know about you but I need to have a little piece of that emptiness and open space in order for me to be creative.

### **To be creative I must WORK HARD**

There's a saying about this, that creativity is 1% inspiration and 99% perspiration. Because, let's face it, you have to put the work in. Tim didn't get good at improvisation on the piano by just sitting down one day and 'tada!'. He worked hard, did lessons, spent countless hours of practice.

If you want to get good at something you have to put in the effort, it's just the way life is. It's not always fun. But we are happy to make that commitment when there is something that we love that makes it worthwhile

*What are you willing to work hard at?*

### **To be creative I must RELAX, muck around, waste time**

And now, the opposite truth. Hard work is not the same as creativity, and can in fact crush creativity. Creativity requires free space, play ... disengaging the rules of normal life and mucking around. Safe space where it's OK if things don't work, in fact things which look to other people like 'failures' can be the best springboard for creativity.

*Tell the person next to you – what do you do to relax and muck around and recharge?*

Going back to the very beginning, in Genesis, God completed his work of creation by resting, and calling on his people to rest. Time out is not running away from what we need to do, it is an essential part of being creative.

SUMMARISE

BUT ... there are things that stop us from being creative

**FEAR OF STUFFING UP**

**BUSYNES**

**STRESS**

**DUTY**

We will never get rid of these things, but we can push them aside, sit on them long enough to make room for ourselves to play, to explore, to rest, and try new things.

I think that God is wanting to give us permission to be creative. God needs us to be creative. God is eager to work through us through his Holy Spirit to bring into being things which do not yet exist.

**Sing: Take my gifts**

PERMISSION SLIP

*I give you permission  
to day dream, to try,  
to experiment, to play,  
to muck around, waste time,  
ask silly questions, to fail  
and to rest.*

*The world needs what only YOU can create!*

*With all my love,  
your Heavenly Father,*

*God*

## **Quotes about Creativity:**

"We need to be open minded, fluid, look for alternatives and not for the correct answer. When we think creatively there are many alternatives and no one correct answer."

Giovanni Coazza

"Inspiration often comes illusive and tantalizing. I have had work or ideas come through me from a source that I cannot identify."

Elizabeth Gilbert

"Creativity isn't a switch that's flipped on or off; it's a way of seeing, engaging with and responding to the world around you. A creative mind communicates ideas in a fresh way."

Rod Judkins

"Whatever I know how to do, I've already done. Therefore I must always do what I do not know how to do."

Eduardo Chillida

"Our true nature is our inventive nature; creativity is a primal aspect of our being. We need our world of imagination, day-dreaming, to go away from the world of operations, to imagine, to visualize. Ask yourself: 'what would this seem like if it were something else?'. Weave together the fabric of 'what is' and 'what could be', mesh the 2 worlds together. In doing so you get a fresh answer.

... I would rather have eloquent failure than boring success."

Raphael DiLuzio

### **Pescatore, Chef de Cuisine**

"Creativity costs nothing, the ambition and desire to use it costs you the certainty of success" – Reon Hobson

### **Rod Judkins**

Creativity isn't a switch that's flipped on or off; it's a way of seeing, engaging with and responding to the world around you. A creative mind communicates ideas in a fresh way.

Most people don't develop their talents because they are made to feel that they weren't born with the amount required to be truly great.

Creativity isn't mysterious, it can be learned.

### **Giovanni Coazza in Rome**

'outside the box' ... thinking beyond what we already know

what is outside is invisible, so risky, because nobody else knows either very difficult to 'go out of the box'

If we want to go out of the box we need to add something different, a little spice, something that goes beyond the convergent information, something wrong, something absurd, something that is apparently not relevant, something which takes us far. This is what we call 'divergent' information. We need some 'divergent' information to take us across the line from what we know to what we have not yet thought about. It takes us to a place where we do not know where to go. You have no preset direction. It brings us to a feeling that we should immediately go back. This does not make any sense. We must resist this temptation. We need to value LONG thinking. It is some thought that takes us

far. We can use association of ideas, combinations of ideas, principles applied to areas where they were never applied before. We need to be open minded, fluid, look for alternatives and not for the correct answer. When we think creatively there are many alternatives and no one correct answer.

It is difficult to assess the value of something new.

We have to look for the match between a new idea and our initial drive or focus.

A new idea will challenge our social environment, everybody around you.

If the environment punishes mistakes you will never be tempted to go out of the box, you will remain safely in a known environment. So if you want to stimulate an environment which is creative you need to allow divergent ideas, you need to allow irrelevant information to come in. You have to mix and match different disciplines. You have to use metaphors.

### Raphael DiLuzio

#### 7 steps of creative thinking

1 stage: formulate a question or problem or difficult situation to overcome  
frame a question

#### 2. research

process of engaging the world

look at things, taste, smell things

go into the world, experience things around the question you have

#### 3. Enough! 'basta'

#### 4. Gestation. Hold the question.

3 activities ... a state of detachment ... do divergent activities, something different  
... approach through metaphor ... how would this be if it was a tree, or herd of geese  
fearlessness of imagination. Our true nature is our inventive nature, a primal aspect of our being.

Our world of imagination, day-dreaming

go away from the world of operations, imagine, visualize

what would this seem like if it were something else?

weave together the fabric of empiricism and imagination

mesh the 2 worlds together

in doing so you can get a fresh answer

#### 5. Inspiration

a good idea

Eureka moments ... flashes of inspiration

believe in the validity of little moments

important to write them down

#### 6. Making it, bringing it into reality

deal with fear of failure

"I would rather have eloquent failure than boring success"

Innovate, create

7. Testing, criticism  
sharing them, asking what people think