

Good Morning,

Our series on Names for God allows us to be introduced again and again to the God we know and the God we do not know fully. Listening to Susanne & Anita and writing the sermon for this morning I have been struck with how many times I flip between the reactions of a deep resonance of familiarity in God, and shyly approaching the unknown. It's beautiful to investigate and sit with so many different pictures of the same thing. It reminds me of the Indian Parable many of you know; the Blind People and the Elephant:

A group of blind people heard that a strange animal, called an elephant, had been brought to the town, but none of them were aware of its shape and form. Out of curiosity, they said: "We must inspect and know it by touch, of which we are capable". So, they sought it out, and when they found it they groped about it. The first person, whose hand landed on the trunk, said "This being is like a thick snake". For another one whose hand reached its ear, it seemed like a kind of fan. As for another person, whose hand was upon its leg, the elephant is a pillar like a tree-trunk. The person who placed their hand upon its side said the elephant, "is a wall". Another who felt its tail, described it as a rope. The last felt its tusk, stating the elephant is that which is hard, smooth and like a spear.

I have often heard this parable used in conflict resolution classes, so it's appropriate that it comes up also for names of God. All of the people in this story are right and all of the people in the story are wrong. Maybe that is a little discouraging, but I found it reassuring. Nadia Bolz-Weber states **"I need a God who is bigger and more nimble and mysterious than what I could understand or contrive. Otherwise it can feel like I am worshipping nothing more than my own ability to understand the Divine."** This sentiment helped me to face the intimidating task exploring today's name for God.

We are looking at “God as Creative.” I’m using ‘Creative’ here as a noun, as a title in itself, rather than a descriptor. I love this name for God and I have so much fear in trying to explain what it means to me. It feels a little too vague, too general, and frankly too hippie for me to hide behind a mound of research books – although I promise I tried.

A few years ago, I got to participate in a sunrise scripture contemplation exercise that was based around this morning’s Psalm. We walked around Keats Island and listened as someone new would read the psalm and then ask a prompting question for us to dwell on, silently or aloud. During one of the readings the question was ‘what do you see?’ And I got a vision, or day-dream of God as Creative. I saw Creative (that is God) as the light and color and wind that is pictured on our bulletin cover. Starting in the ground, in the dust and dancing us all into existence, the trees, a bird, myself. Twirling us all into creation, letting us dance ourselves into being. Participating and being led, gifted with our creatureliness. It was beautiful, I could hardly breathe. And though we may have met many times before then, that is when I remember first being introduced to Creative. It was different from God as creator, a slight turn in the kaleidoscope of who God is.

Later while studying ‘The Color Purple’ by Alice Walker, I saw the characters meet the same God I had met. Duane K. Friesen quickly walks us through this transformation in Walker’s novel. Celie has been stuck with one image of God her whole life **“big and old and tall and gray-bearded and white... this old white man is the same God she used to see when she pray... that’s the one that’s in the white folk’s white bible.”** This image of God is tightly wound with the structures of racism and patriarchy that nearly destroy her. That image had become so useless and harmful to her that she tosses out God all together.

Then her friend Shug introduces her to Creative. Shug says **“My first stop from the old white man was trees. Then air. Then birds. Then other people... one day when I was sitting quiet... it comes to me: that feeling of being part of everything, not separate at all... I laughed and I cried and I run all around the house... God love everything you love – and a mess of stuff you don’t.”** Duane picks out the last letter of the book which shows Celie’s shift in mentality. It is addressed: **“Dear God. Dear stars. Dear trees, dear sky, dear people, dear everything. Dear God.”**

Creative is present with the cosmos, as Ecclesiastes states in vs. 11 **God has made everything in harmony with the divine.** Potter, Artist, Creator, these names fill our scriptures with images of the beauty and skill that fill this world. Symbol and Icon play a large role in some churches, music plays a large role in this one. These are all pieces of the experience of Creative among us. Gertrude Mueller Nelson has written a book titled **“Dancing with God”** that explores at length what God we are inviting into our worship spaces.

We are really good at letting in the intellectual God, the God of knowledge and moral high ground, and we are good at welcoming in our servant king. But the church has a back and forth relationship with the poetic, the aesthetic. Nelson writes about how **“the poetic aspect of the Church... has nourished us through rite and symbol, through rhythmic repetition ... inviting us to see and engage and feel and touch and be aware and grow and be transformed. Through myth and symbol and experiences in which our daily lives are affirmed and made sacred.”** Sometimes Creative gets placed in the category of performance rather than transcendence. And the poetic is understood as mere decoration, it is surface rather than transformative.

Beauty is a piece of the experience of Creative, but not the whole. Duane argues that **“the word beauty does not adequately describe the aesthetic experience we derive from a painting or a poem that can upset us and cause us to feel pain, anguish, or profound uncertainty.”** It is the world’s call back to wholeness, as Creative awakes this yearning within us. It is the moment of being awake, being present, being.

In our Psalm we meet Creative in cosmic wonder and in Ecclesiastes we are introduced to Creative in the ordinary and commonplace. Our text gives us the sense that human beings have a place in the stately unrolling of the universal. We are entirely incapable of knowing the big picture, or bringing about Creative’s vision, and yet we are invited into the dance, to live, and eat, and work, and to honor **the sacred** – the creative – **that is alive in us** [vs.14]. To experience and create joy for our lives and beyond.

I want to focus in on vs. 11 again **“God has made everything in harmony with the divine; yet although the Almighty has imbued eternity in our soul, we are unable to grasp the totality of God’s work from beginning to end.”** We cannot understand and yet we are filled with the existence of this truth. The experience of being touched by Creative leaves us aware of contradictions and ambiguity, and certain that somehow still by experiencing this piece of God we have seen the whole truth.

It’s that moment of epiphany, of awe and wonder that leaves us lost when we try to retell it later to a friend, because what is so special is also ordinary and absurd. It’s just life, and it’s in all of us, it’s who we are and what we do. And yet when we notice it, it’s jarring and calming.

As creatures of Creative, what is said about the Divine leaves a message about us. Our Psalm has been creatively rewritten to read as follows

And these creatures,

In their short stay on this world,

Were appointed to be your co-workers.

In the ever-continuing process of creation.

Your creativity has never ceased.

It continues in and through our lives. [Psalm/Now]

To be in relationship with Creative is to embrace the way we have been formed in this very image, as ‘little Creatives’ if you will. To be clear I am not saying ‘little painters’ or ‘little potters’ or ‘little musicians’ but ‘little Creatives,’ open ended. I’ve never really connected with the idea of myself as creative, and this is largely because I never felt good enough at something to really own that descriptor. In my mind creativity had a certain bar of excellence that I had to meet before I could claim it for my own, and to my measurement I never reached it.

April Yamasaki widened this definition for me. She has a resource called ‘Spark: Igniting your God-given Creativity.’ Within these pages she taught me a few things. An essential one being the root of the word ‘create.’ Historically this word’s most basic meaning comes from the proto-indo-euro word *Kerh*, which means ‘grow.’ So lets start there, if we begin to think ‘grow’ when we hear ‘create,’ it quickly surpasses the limits we might place around ourselves as creative or not creative people. It’s easier to accept the idea that we are growing people, that we can use the space that we take up in this world to grow ourselves and our surroundings. Yamasaki digs into this parallel illustrating that just **“as growth unfolds as a natural part of life even before birth, so creativity unfolds and blossoms as part of life too.”**

The Arts reflect the Creative Spirit, and bring us out of our need for knowing, to be synonymous with rational vocabulary. They help us to foster an ability to exercise our imagination. Creative is active in the Arts, but is in no way confined to them. Creativity is taking risks; it is a trusting in something that does not belong to us, but that is within us. It is both innovative and adaptive.

If we look at Creativity as Growth, then what does it mean for Christians to follow Creativity as a way of life? To be both “little Christs” and “little Creatives?” To be stirred up by God, and to respond with a willingness to enter the dance of creating? To read the gospel texts with eyes to see Creative incarnate in Jesus, whose risk and trust and innovation broke through the dogmas of right and wrong and found the way of love and truth outside of the confines of strict structures.

Of course, some of our biggest obstacles to accessing the Creative within us are distraction and fear. Yamasaki admits that **“If the creative life is all up to me, there are a thousand reasons why it can’t be done. But ... for creativity that never runs out, I need to shift my focus from myself and my own resources to God’s provision. Instead of offering excuses, I can offer what I have. Instead of denying or belittling God’s gift, I can be willing for God to stir my heart and use me.”**

Creative is not a small piece of God, but is fundamental to who God is, and to who we are as human beings made in Creative’s image. My experience of Creative is transcendent and constant. It is **“bigger and more nimble and more mysterious than what I could understand”** [Bolz-Weber] and still it is something I know to be true.

In a sermon riddled with quotations, I’m going to end with just one more. It is from a thank you note by Vincent Van Gogh, to his brother Theo who supported him throughout his life as a struggling artist. In this letter Vincent writes **“there is nothing more truly artistic than to love people.”** Thank you Creative, for loving us into existence. Amen.