

Drawn In: Living Out the Creative Life with God

DREAM June 6, 2021

WELCOME and ANNOUNCEMENTS

We welcome you to this time of worship and as we do so, we acknowledge that McClure United Church stands on treaty 6 territory and homeland of the Metis Nation. We pay our respect to elders both past and present, wherever we find ourselves today. We also acknowledge our commitment as an Affirming Ministry of the United Church of Canada as we strive to be an open-minded, inclusive and welcoming place of worship. It is our hope that no matter your age, race, class, ability, gender, gender identity and sexual orientation, you will feel the warmth and blessing of God's love today. And we give thanks to God for this opportunity to gather together for worship, reflection, song and prayer. May you feel the God's blessing upon you today.

Good morning and welcome to the worship of God with McClure United Church this morning. Today we are beginning together a 6 week worship series called "Drawn In: Living Out the Creative Life with God". This series is based on a book by Troy Bronsink... "Drawn In: A Creative Process for Artists, Activists, and Jesus Followers".

Now you may not consider yourself to be an artist.. or an activist... or even a Jesus follower.. and I'm willing to bet that a number of you you're not creative.

I'm not trying to tell you what to think... but I think you're probably wrong. All of us have been gifted with some form of creativity... I don't think we'd be able to survive this life, if we weren't. The question is... have we been living out of that creativity? Have we been able to open up to our creativity and allowed it to guide us along our spiritual paths?

So over the next few weeks we'll explore together some surprising parallels between creativity and the spiritual path... and hopefully we can discovery some ways to open up that path – to expand it... to expand our awareness of God's involvement... of God's desire for us to break free or away from whatever limits... or barriers... that have kept us from being able to fully explore and connect with the spiritual path we are on.

So throughout this series we will be challenged together by the question:

Does God live within OUR dream, or do we live within GOD's dream?

How we answer that question – not with our lips but with our lives – probably plays a big part in determining the extent to which we will be truly happy.

If God's role in your life is merely to live within YOUR dream, then God must live within the limits of your intelligence and imagination. You define the path, and God must stay within your boundaries and your timeframe. But.. when you live within God's dream, the spiritual path becomes far larger than you can imagine.

In the creative process—as in the process of spiritual transformation—you dream God's dream, then you hover around God's dream until your response to it comes out of your deepest loves and passions. After a period of hovering, you take the risk of acting on what you've discerned. Once you've acted, you listen. You listen because you've entered new territory and need to pay attention to the new information you receive as a result of being in

a new place. Then you reintegrate your listening to further refine the vision and adjust course where necessary. Finally, you rest and celebrate what you and God have accomplished together—which further inspires you to dream all over again.

And that is the outline for the next few weeks. Dream. Hover. Risk. Listen. Reintegrate. Celebrate.

I'm really looking forward to sharing this with you and I'm also looking forward to digging a little deeper into each week's theme with a small group discussion. There is a companion small group discussion guide that goes along with the book and it looks really really good. So if you would like to join me and others on Wednesdays from 6:30-7:30pm, beginning on June 9, please find the Zoom link on our website, facebook page and in today's weekly email. Its not the sort of thing that you need to participate in each week... come or not come as you time allows. We are going to begin the group on Zoom and if folks are interested in gathering in person a little later... and if safety protocols allow, we might be able to do that. I'm really looking forward to having an opportunity to discuss each week's theme with you.

The Friday Zoom Coffee Group has decided to continue for as long as people are showing up. So that's every Friday at 10am on Zoom... the weekly Bible study will be ending for the summer – the last one will be on June 23rd. It has been so great to share in this weekly study with clergy and lay folks from around Saskatchewan – and I believe there was even someone from Toronto joining us. It is our hope to continue with this format again in the fall.... regardless of where we are at with in person gatherings – so if you missed out this time around – there'll be another opportunity.

Youth groups and Rainbow Village have wrapped up for the summer. Eden and I will be visiting each family sometime over this month to deliver ice cream and have a wee outdoor visit... we are also putting together summer faith kits for families to enjoy over the next couple of months so if you would like one of those, please let me know. Generally these are geared towards elementary school age kids but, to be honest, I choose things for the kits that I like so... its also good for 52 year olds.

I don't really think I have anything else to offer in announcements but be sure to take a peek at your weekly email for information I may have missed.

OPENING

Sung:

In the world of the driven
Let us be drawn in
Let your love be a given
Let us be drawn in
To imagine, to dream, to create, to redeem
For the sake of the livin'
Let us be drawn in.

All creation began with the dream of God, the will and intention for life to exist in the void.
All of our actions are born out of desire, out of a dream and vision for the future. This is

our birthright: to imagine and to create. What brings you alive? What truly moves your soul in the deepest way? What you create out of that answer is your greatest gift to the world and the way in which you are part of God's unfolding and ongoing creative dream!

Sung:

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Let us be drawn in
Let your love be a given
Let us be drawn in
To imagine, to dream, to create, to redeem
For the sake of the livin'
Let us be drawn in.

Let us pray together:
Creating God,
you called forth all that exists
in a moment of divine brilliance.
Open us again to that spark which you ignited
in each of us at our creation
so that we might generate more life-giving energy in this world.
Draw us into your story of hope.
Give us the courage to dream.
Amen.

OPENING SONG: My Love Colours Outside the Lines – Sacred Sounds

SCRIPTURE

Luke 4:13-21

“Jesus returned in the power of the Spirit to Galilee, and news about him spread throughout the whole countryside. He taught in their synagogues and was praised by everyone. Jesus went to Nazareth, where he had been raised. On the Sabbath, he went to the synagogue as he normally did and stood up to read. The synagogue assistant gave him the scroll from the prophet Isaiah. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written: The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me. He has sent me to preach good news to the poor, to proclaim release to the prisoners, and recovery of sight to the blind, to liberate the oppressed, and to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor. He rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the synagogue assistant, and sat down. Every eye in the synagogue was fixed on him. He began to explain to them, ‘Today, this scripture has been fulfilled just as you heard it.’”

SERMON

So in this scripture from Luke... Jesus has returned to his hometown of Nazareth.

It's the sabbath and he was, of course, in the synagogue.
And while he was there... he spoke... and what he said is so important...
it gives us a glimpse of the vastness... magnitude of God's desire.. of God's dream for how
the people should be living out their faith.

The people of Nazareth had no doubt heard about the amazing preaching and teaching
Jesus had been sharing throughout Galilee... and they probably came to listen... ready to
be impressed. Imagine someone from their own neighbourhood... and the son of Joseph...
a carpenter... speaking so powerfully... so eloquently.

I wonder what they were expecting to hear from him that day?
And I wonder if they were surprised by what he said?

Jesus did not congratulate them on their faithfulness. Jesus didn't assure them that God
was on their side.. and their side only. What he did was remind them
of an old story of the prophet Elijah, who ministered to the widow in Zarephath, and
Elijah's protégé Elisha, who cleansed Naaman the Syrian from leprosy (vv. 25-27).

Those stories might sound kind of nice... and harmless to us today... but in Jesus' time
they would have had an edge... a cutting edge. The stories he is sharing are stories of God
helping foreigners. Jesus tells them that even though there were plenty of starving widows
in Israel in Elijah's day, the widow who God called Elijah to save was... an outsider. God
was dreaming not of salvation for one group of people... for one particular nation... God was
dreaming... for everyone - EVERYONE!

And... this is why the mood of Jesus' crowd swiftly moves from admiration and awe... to
uncomfortable – to adversarial... when he reminds them of these stories.
And Jesus isn't just sharing stories of God's dream for the world... he actually expects
those listening to expand their own vision – their own dream – to include not only
themselves and their safety and comfort – but to include all people –
And to not just acknowledge God's dream but to do something about it... to be part of
bringing God's dream to reality.

And so the same people who were just singing his praises and claiming him as their own...
were now ready to haul him right out of the synagogue and throw him off a cliff. That is
how threatened they felt by Jesus' message of releasing captives... of letting the oppressed
go free. Sure they wanted freedom from oppression... but not for THOSE guys – just for
themselves..

God's dream might seem a bit – unrealistic. Its so huge.... An expansive vision.
How can God possibly expect any of us to take on all these issues? Solving poverty,
releasing the captives, healing the sick, freeing the oppressed?
That's a lot of work... and I'm already pretty busy – to be honest, I feel exhausted just
thinking about it.

But... I wonder if the way we live God's dream is not about taking on every single issue that
God considers important... but rather to get deeply in touch with those things that stir our
souls and then devote our energy to those. Devoting life energy to doing the soul-stirring
work that brings our hearts... our minds... our bodies to life.

While its important for us to pay attention to things like – paychecks.. or investments... or whatever we need to ensure that our basic needs are met... our souls need and desire far more than whatever it is that money can buy.

Once the soul is assured of the survival of the physical body that holds it, it can turn to other things that matter.... Like the need to give and receive love... grace.. forgiveness. The need to belong in community with others... and the need to serve a cause that is more than about just survival.

Now if these needs of the soul are met through our vocation, we can work incredibly hard and almost never feel like we've been really working at all. Maybe we even lie awake at night dreaming about ways to do our work better for no other reason than because dreaming of these things makes us happy... gives us pleasure.

Yet, if the soul's needs aren't being met, then its possible the only thing we're dreaming about with respect to our work, is how to do less of it.

Can you think of anyone you've encountered who you can just tell that the work they do is also their soul work? Often I think of people in so called helping professions as people who's work is feeding their soul. But when I started thinking about people who really seemed to be finding pleasure in what they do... there were two people who immediately came to mind. One is a young guy who works at the 7-11 on Central Avenue. I am so happy when I go in there and see that he is working. He always greets the customers with such enthusiasm and whenever I've gone to pay he always asks me... like really asks me as though he cares... how my day is. I always leave the store feeling better than when I went in. Is working at 7-11 his passion? I don't know... but I don't think that the joy that he exudes... can not possibly be fake... maybe his passion is helping others to feel noticed.

I also immediately thought of several school teachers I know who clearly love what they do and are doing it for much bigger reasons than the pay check. I know there are teachers who spend almost as much as they make on supplies and other things to make their classrooms and class time engaging, comfortable and fun for the kids.

I think of doctors and nurses who seem to treat their patients... each one... as though they are treating the most valuable person on earth. They aren't treating a condition or disease... they are treating a person. And they aren't just concerned with the level of care that person is receiving from them but how they are being treated by the healthcare system as a whole... and if they discover that the treatment is poor – they're prepared to do something about it.

In all areas of work – paid and volunteer – or those who are neither paid or really volunteer their work but who are just always doing what they can to care for others, there are people who's souls seem to be full of passion – and compassion.

This really is the essence of ministry. Ministry isn't about who has the designation... its about who lives the life. You can be a minister without ever preaching Jesus to those you minister to. You simply need to treat them as if they are the embodiment of God. When Jesus said, "whatever you do to the least of my people you do to me," he meant it!

Except perhaps for those of us in paid church ministry positions, you may never need to preach the gospel of Jesus to be deeply involved in Christian ministry. This is practicing a quieter gospel. Just by treating others... all others... with the same respect and dignity as Jesus, you not only live within God's dream... but you are also making God's dream a reality.

I recently heard about a church in the US.. Countryside Community Church...who created a program to help the lay folks in their congregation find a "calling" in life that ignited their passion and then helping them to understand this calling as coming from God and living out this calling as serving God.

Once they completed this program, they were then considered to be ministers of that congregation – not ordained or diaconal ministers... but ministers of what they referred to as "the Quiet Gospel"

Ministers of Medicine, Ministers of autoeconomics, Ministers of Grandparenting ... Ministers of Food Service... Ministers of Gardening... Ministers of Teaching... of Administration... of Engineering... of whatever their passion was.

The minister of this congregation said they set a goal of helping 200 of its members to become ministers in the congregation within five years. He said it was an audacious goal and they weren't at all sure how they were going to pull it off their limited resources. But then he said,

"a funny thing happens when you seek to live within God's dream rather than making God live within yours. God isn't limited by your intelligence and imagination. God isn't even limited by your perception of the available resources. Simply put, God is able to be a more creative participant in helping you fulfill God's dream than you can ever imagine. Dreaming God's dream also engages you with others who are trying to dream God's dream as well."

At the same time a seminary that had ceased to be a seminary... closing their doors to students.. had revisioned themselves. They believed that just because they could no longer be a seminary didn't mean that they had to stop trying to live God's dream. They reformed themselves as a Center and continued to ask how they could be of service.

Because of their willingness to dream, they proposed a partnership with Countryside Church.. offering a financial grant that allowed them to hire a full-time "Pastor of Lay Ministries." This person's entire job now is to help their members find their "calling" and live out their passion as a ministry of the Christian church.

And the Center's own passion and dream continues to grow as well as they share their vision of a new model for ministry that understands laypeople as having callings that are as critical for the fulfillment of God's dream on earth as any clergy person. Laypeople are on the front lines... the front line workers... in the world... of God's dream. They are not content simply to proclaim God's dream; they go out and live it. Their ministry, in fact, goes a long way to fulfilling the dream Jesus proclaimed the gospel of Luke.

I love this so much. I don't think some of us in Ministry have been so good at helping lay folks see and claim their life passions as key to living out the gospel of Jesus. I don't remember the last time I had a conversation with someone from the church about the ministry they are offering in the work they do and celebrating their commitment to sharing

the “Quiet Gospel”. I wonder if we keep separate our work/home/volunteer life and our church life. I know I talk a lot about sharing God’s love in the world... and I think that’s so important but its not enough... we need to do better at acknowledging the love that you already are sharing... of all the ways you are helping God’s dream be a reality. And if you are truly feeling as though you have nothing to offer... or no passion to pursue... or you just can’t imagine how managing a busy office or doing accounting things or pumping gas or whatever it - might be is.. or can be.. a ministry – we need to talk. All of what we do in life.. no matter our age or stage in life... is an opportunity minister – to fulfill God’s dream. Would you approach what you do for paid work... or as volunteer work... or in your home any differently if you thought of what you do as a ministry of the church?

So this is what we’ll be diving into a little more deeply over the next few weeks... on Sunday mornings and Wednesday evenings for those of you wishing to participate in the discussion group. I’m very excited.

And all of this ties back to creativity. It takes a certain amount of creativity to discover and live out our passion.

Social activist Dorothy Day said, “God is our Creator. God made us in God’s image and likeness. Therefore we are creators... The joy of creativeness should be ours.” Sometimes what holds us back is not believing that we ARE a child of God. Many of us think “oh, I’m not ‘creative!’” Hear the Good News! Know that you are creative simply because you were created by God!

(interview with Joyce Lenz)

May you all see the things you do, no matter how small or mundane, as the way that you contribute goodness to the world, creating more life, more joy, more love.

PASTORAL PRAYERS/LORD’S PRAYER

Holy One,

draw us now to be with you as you are always with us.

As we prepare our hearts for this sacred time of prayer, may we feel your love surround us, giving us what we need right now to be fully present to you... for the sake of our community, our world, and ourselves. In opening ourselves to your creative power, strength and wisdom – we open to live your dream... to be channels of your passion for the world.

And we hold your dream now as we take a moment in quiet to give thanks for all of the blessings you have shared with us... in gratitude we pray: *(silence)*

And now with hearts touching gratitude, we are ready to offer our prayers of care and concern for the world... for our friends, families and for ourselves.

We hold before you, O God, those who are in need of our love, our kindness, and our compassion... those in need of our prayers:

the ones who are struggling right now – with worry, fear, sadness, loneliness, anger

the ones who are living with health concerns...

the ones who are grieving...

the ones who are addicted...

the ones facing loss and change and uncertainty...

and we pray for the ones who care for them – for the support workers, family members and friends...

We pray for all the painful places of injustice in our world and in our communities...

For the ones who live with trauma... the trauma that comes from discrimination, rejection, violent words and actions...

We pray for the ones struggling to be good allies, friends and neighbours.

We pray especially now for everyone who has been impacted by the discovery of the remains of children who attended residential school in Kamloops. As our Indigenous relatives live in the depths of grief and anger, may those of us who are settlers, also feel the full weight of this horror. And may we continue to work to decolonize ourselves and our church so such atrocities never take place again.

We pray God for all the places of brokenness in your world...

We pray for your healing love and light to reach into those places, offering even a moment.. even a glimmer of hope to those who most need it.

And knowing that we all have our own places and people where brokenness exists, we take another moment now in quiet to hold our brokenness before God – opening even further to the love that is within and all around us. *(silence)*

O God, hear our prayers, receive our hearts and from your deep love may we find the healing and hope we need... today and every day.

And now, we share together the prayer that Jesus taught his friends and disciples:
Our Father/Mother/Creator...

CLOSING SONG: Go Make a Difference – Sacred Sounds

BLESSING

I invite you to consider one thing you can do this week that will make your heart sing.

And may you see the unfolding of each day,
as an opportunity to be a Co-Creator with God.

As a Jesus-Follower, may you feel his company leading you
toward creating more kindness, justice and mercy.

May you know the nudge of the Creative Spirit within,
“making belief” in all you are and do.

SUNG BLESSING: Sent Out In Jesus’ Name – Elin Sletmoen