

Drawn In: Living Out the Creative Life with God

LISTEN

July 4, 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 everyone and welcome to the worship of God with McClure United Church today.

As always I am so grateful that you have chosen to spend this time with us today. Learning all of the technology we needed to in order to offer online worship has been worth it knowing that folks are connecting and finding some meaning in the worship services.

I, like most of you, look forward to being in person again – hopefully in September – but I will also miss some aspects of preparing the online service.

My favourite part of being online though is knowing that there are folks tuning in who otherwise might not be able to experience worship – those who live away or those who for whatever reason aren't able to come to the church building.

This feels like an important outreach opportunity and we are certainly looking at ways to maintain an online presence here even after it is safe to meet in person.

We had our first in person coffee this Friday and it was amazing to see some familiar faces attached to bodies... not just the Zoom heads that I'm used to. We will continue to meet Friday mornings at 10am in the church parking lot for anyone who would like to join in. Bring a chair, if you have one and your own beverage and connect with other members of this community. We will continue to wear masks and keep some physical distance for the time being.. still wanting to do what we can to keep each other safe.

I've noticed that some notes have already begun arriving for you-know-who... and you still have plenty of time to get yours in. You know who will be returning to work on July 19th and we are going to fill her desk with words of welcome.

And I have one more announcement from our Community Engagement Coordinator, Eden. Over the last two weekends Eden and I have had been delivering ice cream treats and summer packages to our church children. Its been great to see everyone – and they’ve all grown so much! If you did not sign up for a visit but have decided you’d like one now.. its not too late and there’s plenty of left over ice cream. Or, if you would just like a summer activity kit... please let me know and I’m happy to delivery it. Here’s Eden...

And that’s all we have for announcements today. Please be sure to check your email though in case there is anything I have missed.

And breathe deeply of God’s love... grounding ourselves wherever we are... are preparing our hearts and minds for worship.

OPENING

(music begins)

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

(music continues)

“Listening” as part of creativity is about perceiving. We open our senses to see what is emerging. Perhaps what we start doesn’t end up looking like what we thought it would. Instead, once the act of creating begins, we listen to how the Spirit is guiding our next steps and unfolding possibilities we were previously unaware of. Without paying attention in this way, we act as if we have all the answers. And when we are up against something that doesn’t go our way, we see it as a negative. But what if those moments are simply Co-Creator God inviting us to see new ways of moving forward in our lives?

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

Let us pray:
Co-Creating God,
you sometimes present us with different plans.
Open us to the idea that you might have something in store for us
that we have not previously been able to imagine.
Draw us into your surprises.
Give us the courage to get out of our own mold.
Amen.

OPENING SONG

SCRIPTURE

Acts 16:6-15

“They went through the region of Phrygia and Galatia, having been forbidden by the Holy Spirit to speak the word in Asia. When they had come opposite Mysia, they attempted to go into Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus did not allow them; so, passing by Mysia, they went down to Troas. During the night Paul had a vision: there stood a man of Macedonia pleading with him and saying, ‘Come over to Macedonia and help us.’ When he had seen the vision, we immediately tried to cross over to Macedonia, being convinced that God had called us to proclaim the good news to them. We set sail from Troas and took a straight course to Samothrace, the following day to Neapolis, and from there to Philippi, which is a leading city of the district of Macedonia and a Roman colony. We remained in this city for some days. On the sabbath day we went outside the city gate by the river, where we supposed there was a place of prayer; and we sat down and spoke to the women who had gathered there. A certain woman named Lydia, a worshiper of God, was listening to us; she was from the city of Thyatira and a dealer in purple cloth. The Lord opened her heart to listen eagerly to what was said by Paul. When she and her household were baptized, she urged us, saying, ‘If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come and stay at my home.’ And she prevailed upon us.”

REFLECTION

New Coke, Pepsi Clear, Cheeto flavoured lip balm, smokeless cigarettes...

there are tons of examples throughout history of entrepreneurial endeavors that have gone horribly wrong... and they've gone wrong because they lacked one vital thing... listening

and this is the fourth stage of the creative process.

The difference between success and failure can often be traced right back to the lack of listening.

So today we are going to be spending some time reflecting on what might be the difference between a life path that takes us somewhere... and one that seems to go – nowhere....

the difference has little to do with failure to dream.. or to hover.. or to risk... but might have a lot to do with failure to listen once we've found our path and have begun walking it.

The path is never a straight line and you will almost always stray away from it if you assume that you can just move straight on from Point A to Point B.

The spiritual path is not a straight line.

and we'll talk more about the spiritual path in just a sec...

first we're going to talk about one other failureW.

One of the more famous examples of a manufacturer who did a great job Dreaming, Hovering, and Risking but utterly failed for lack of Listening is the creation of the Edsel automobile in the late 1950s.

Henry Ford dreamed big when it came to the Edsel, imagining a whole new line of automobiles with four different models and eighteen different trim levels.

Ford had "hovered" over the dream like no other company had before, sinking enormous money into market research to determine exactly what the American public wanted in a car.

Then they merged those ideas into a workable prototype.

After Dreaming and Hovering, Ford took an enormous Risk on its dream car, building state-of-the-art production facilities and lining up a cross-country network of dealers that would exclusively sell the Edsel line.

The whole time, the public never had a chance to see the Edsel.

The car even arrived at the dealership under wraps until the first public unveiling.

So all told, Ford took a \$400 million risk developing the Edsel and bringing it to market. That's well over \$4 billion in today's dollars. Obviously Ford had no idea what a terrible flop it would be.

The public found Edsel's "unique styling" uniquely hideous. The most memorable design feature of the Edsel, its front grille, resembled a horse collar in many people's eyes, or worse: a toilet seat!

Customers found some of the car's fancy new technology to be quite a nuisance as well—even a danger.

The Teletouch pushbutton automatic transmission selector.. for example.

The gear shifter was located right at the center of the steering column... the place where the horn had traditionally been...

this meant that many drivers inadvertently shifted gears when they went to sound the horn.

These are just a couple on a long list of mistakes that would likely have been avoided had Ford moved from Risk to Listening rather than Risk to Production.

A commitment to Listening would have meant that they test their prototype on actual potential customers rather than showing it only to marketing executives and sales people.

Three years after the first Edsel appeared in showrooms, Ford discontinued the line, having concluded that its losses were draining the company dry.

So...this story reveals a strikingly uncomfortable parallel with the spiritual life.

What led to Ford's failure was its overconfidence that it had already figured out what the public wanted through its intensive market research.

And in the same way, I wonder if people of faith run into trouble when we think we've heard "the word of the God" for us and then stop listening...

we stop listening to those around us... and we stop listening to God.

We are 100% confident that we're heading in the right direction.

I think that a really good sign that I.. or someone else.. is maybe a little out of touch with our spiritual journey – a little of out touch with where God is calling us... when we are that certain that we are heading in the right direction.

It's not that God doesn't want us to be confident in the direction we're called to follow. It's just that our path through life is never a straight one.

You've likely noticed that.
It's not meant to be a straight one.

The spiritual journey is a bit like a meandering path.
When we are never sure what might be around the next bend, we've got to remain attentive... we don't want to miss an important turn.
Constant listening—awareness—is crucial to the spiritual path.

Some of us have got to learn to be more comfortable going with the flow...

Listening and going with the flow find a pretty concrete expression in the life of the apostle Paul.

Paul was deeply committed to Dreaming God's dream for the world, Hovering until he found his place within that dream, and Risking everything he had to follow where he was called.

But unlike the Ford Motor Company, Paul knew that even when you've done your homework and committed to a course of action, you cannot stop listening. In fact, you must listen more carefully than ever.

There's often a real big difference between where you think the flow is taking you... and where it's really going to go.

In today's scripture, for example, we find Paul and a close companion named Silas in the midst of Paul's second missionary journey.

They've been travelling to some places Paul's been before
(and was nearly killed in, by the way):

Lystra, Derbe, and Iconium.

In Lystra, Paul and Silas take on another travelling companion... Timothy.

Then, they head straight for Ephesus in Asia Minor ... or so they think.

Little do they know, but the relatively straightforward journey from Iconium to Ephesus will morph into a journey thousands of miles further and a couple years longer than they had originally been led to believe.

On the surface of things, it looks like Paul has more certainty about what the Holy Spirit is telling him than you and I might have.

God says, "hey Paul.. go here" and Paul goes;

God says, "no no Paul.. don't go there"... and Paul listens.

Paul's course changed three times during his travels across ancient Anatolia.

Paul was not the kind of person who embarked on any journey without a sense of call by the Holy Spirit...which Paul often referred to as “the Spirit of Jesus.”

Paul had seen so much evidence that God was actively communicating with humanity... that God desired a relationship with God’s people.

There was no way he would make any big decisions about where he would preach the gospel of Jesus without first consulting with “the Spirit of Jesus.”

It seems like there’s three things Paul knew about following the Spirit that we all could probably benefit from remembering:

First.... Paul knew that the Holy Spirit normally spoke about the present not the future. Paul may have sensed that the Holy Spirit was calling him to move in a certain direction... like he may have thought he was heading for Ephesus because that was the direction he felt called to move... but he couldn’t see the turnoff he needed to take until he’d travelled the path awhile.

We can’t necessary see the final destination... we only need to see the steps we need to take right now and be open to the twists and turns as we encounter them along the way.

Secondly... Paul knew that it’s not necessarily the wrong choice to stop doing things you previously felt a calling to do.

It is especially appropriate if you are sensing a new call – a new direction – that builds on what you had been doing before.

I think often we are hesitant – maybe even fully resistant – to changing our direction... or changing a belief... if we feel like the path we had been on was the path God had called us to.

I don’t know.. maybe its guilt – like we feel as though letting God down.. or rejecting God’s desire for us...

do we believe that God puts us on a path and just wants us to stay there... moving efficiently from point a to b?

Are we able to see that certain directions we’ve followed.. or beliefs we’ve held.. are actually stepping stones to new ones – maybe ones that are more appropriate to our current realities.

And finally... Paul knew that we really shouldn’t be alone when it comes to the difficult process of discerning the flow of our lives... the paths we are following... and where the Spirit is calling us.

Paul rarely travelled alone.

This wasn’t just for safety reasons... or to so he wouldn’t get too lonely...

Paul knew that the Spirit's voice... the Spirit's direction... often comes to us or is affirmed in us by others.

The Holy Spirit doesn't shout at us with billboards or neon signs.. its often much quieter and more subtle than that...

so we all need spiritual companions to help us discern our spiritual journey – the flow of our lives.

Paul's decision to go to Macedonia was probably the result of a conversation with a new travelling companion that he and Silas and Timothy first met in Troas.

This companion's name isn't mentioned in the passage but we can figure out because the language changes mid passage from they.. to we.

They went here and they went there... and then all of a sudden "we" were heading to Macadonia.

The "we" would include the writer of the Book of Acts and that was Luke – same guy who wrote the Gospel of Luke.

So it seems like Paul and his two companions met up with Luke along the way.

And Luke became Paul's most important companion.

Its believed that Luke was a physician – a good kind of friend to have around on a very physically challenging journey.

And its likely that Luke was the one who suggested that they head off to Macedonia... a suggestion that was confirmed by the Holy Spirit in Paul's dream.

So that's pretty amazing... all that happened was the result of this chance meeting with Luke on the journey.

And for that meeting to have happened, Paul had to have still been constantly listening to the Spirit's call.

He already believed he had been called in one direction... but discovered along the way that he needed to make some pretty major adjustments...

and its only because he was listening to the Spirit and was willing to adapt as he went along the way that he was able to meet up with Luke.

And that meeting changed everything.

We're really not so different from Paul... at least in this regard...

The Spirit calls to us just as frequently... and just as softly... as it called to Paul.

The only real difference between most of us and Paul is the degree to which Paul continued Listening... even after he was sure that his life was heading in the right direction.

And the other difference is the degree to which Paul was willing to take a risk and change course in response to where he felt the Spirit calling him.

Paul never got stuck...

So what gets us “stuck” in the creative process?

Creativity expert Adriana Diaz said, “Creativity is a combination of making something happen and letting something happen...”

Sometimes we get stuck because we are working so hard to *make* something happen that we kind of forget.. or become unable – to listen...

to listen for whatever it is that might be unfolding.

to listen for whatever is yearning inside of us... to just come to the surface.

God is the one who lays down the path... who creates the flow
and God is the one who sets the boundaries of what is possible...
and those boundaries are not fixed

God’s boundaries of possibility are defined by the always emerging and new possibilities for growth.

A big part of the creative process is letting go...

and listening...

letting God show us what might be spinning around and bubbling up to the surface of our lives.

So just listen –

and if you need some help – some companions on the journey – feel free to join us on Wednesday at 6:30 on Zoom – so we can listen together.

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 so impacted by the discovery of the unmarked graves of children and adults on Cowesses First Nation and the former location of Marieval Residential School. 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...

BLESSING

I invite you to consider one thing you might do this week that will make your heart sing and your creativity soar... listen for whatever is swirling around and bubbling up

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,
in all that you are.. in all that you do.
Amen.

SUNG BLESSING

Affirming and Connecting

Leader:

What holds us back from the courage to make a move?

Author Robert Gruden said, "Creativity is dangerous. Its pleasure is not the comfort of the safe harbor, but the thrill of the reaching sail."

Sometimes what holds us back is that we are comfortable, even if not happy.

We simply have gotten used to the way things are.

Hear the Good News!

God has created an ever-expanding universe and you are part of it. You can expand your world and the world around you by seeing yourself as God sees you—able to do far more than you can imagine. If you are uncomfortable, it just means you are growing.

As our greeting and passing of the peace today, I invite you to turn to your neighbors and greet them with this, "Go for it!" And if there is a "high-five" involved, so be it!

An Imaginative Word

"Invocation"

by Cynthia Winton-Henry

[if you have dramatists in your congregation, this is a wonderful opportunity to incorporate their skills - this one could work well with three voices]

1: Here's an idea.

Let us make something out of nothing.

No not nothing.

Let us gather up everything that we ever were or are or will be.

Let us be Shapers,

Creators,

Makers,

of Some Thing.

Some World,

Some Living.

Let us dare to succeed at it,

Dare to fail at it,

Dare to fly on the wings of this moment.
Let us improvise our dreams.
Let us leap boldly from the shoulders of our lives,
Our histories,
Our loves,
Our disasters.

2: Here's an idea.
Let us play ourselves out!
(The real work)
Let us do nothing at all.
It may not matter.
Let us run the risk of naked individuality.
Let us go out wildly
Not just as one,
But as a union, an ensemble.

3: Here is an idea.
When we make our worlds
Let us commit to them
hold still with them
let them go when it is time.
Let us breathe,
Let us sing,
Let us laugh,
Let us dance,
Let us see what will be
when we invoke

1: God
2: Creativity
3: and Power.