

Sermon 1-19-2020
Psalm 8
Ephesians 2:1-10

Our job as co-creators; connecting us to each other and to God

When I was in high school, I remember a day in chorus class when a choir from Russia came to visit. This was a professional choir and I believe they were in town for a series of concerts at various venues. However, by virtue of my high school being close to a major University, our class got to hear them perform a sample of their concert during the day.

The choir from Russia was amazing. The men sang lower than I had ever heard before. They made music and sounds that were both unfamiliar and still inspiring and beautiful. All of their songs were in Russian, and I didn't understand a single word. And yet, I was captivated.

There was one choir member in particular that I seemed to connect eyes with me as they were singing. I couldn't understand why we kept seeming to catch each others gaze. Finally during one of our moments of eye contact, she gestured to her shirt, and then pointed to me. Then I got it. We were both wearing Coca-Cola shirts. Hers in Russian, mine in English. It was a cool moment.

But I don't think I remember that day all these years later because we happened to like the same soft drink. Before the shirt connection was made, and long after that, I felt connected to this singer and this choir in a much more cellular level connection. As a singer, these artists were speaking my language, so to speak, even though they were quite literally speaking another language. I felt connected to them in a way I can't quite explain, but that I know is very real.

Perhaps you've been there, or somewhere like it. Where through art or beauty you felt connected with total strangers. Think of gathering at a concert of a favorite band with hundreds or even thousands of strangers, and yet feeling connected. Perhaps it is singing harmony in a group, or dancing to live music. Maybe it was a drum circle where rhythms seem to sync without practice. Or perhaps it was staring a piece of art that was created in a different time or culture or language.

You don't have to know the exact context, or speak the language, or really even understand what is going on at all to understand what is going on. Places that we find ourselves connected to others through the art and beauty being created.

Last week we started a new series on beauty. Meghan reminded us of the role that beauty plays in our lives of faith. Staring at tall trees and beautiful sunsets and endless starlit skies reminds us that there is more to this world than just ourselves. Beauty reminds us of the magnificence and wonderful nature of our creative God.

And today, we will explore that beauty not only show us something about God, but can also allow us to experience God and one another on a deeper level.

Art and beauty connects us to God as we realize our role as co-Creator with God, and it also connects us to one other through our shared humanity and as members of God's beautiful and wondrous creation

Let's pray.

Our reading in Psalm 8 provides an important framework for how we ought to see ourselves in light of the wonderful work of God all around us.

It starts with recognition of how majestic all of creation is. Some of you may have thought of the beauty of creation last week when Meghan asked you to think about the most beautiful thing you had ever seen. Those sunsets that are so deep and colorful that they seem fake. Those nights where you can see more stars than you can even comprehend. Mountain vistas and rolling shorelines. The work of God is evident in all of creation!

And then the Psalmist asks a really important question: Who are we that we get to be a part of this? Considering the beauty all around us, why is it that God has considered man as a part of this creation? Perhaps you've had a moment like that where you stand and observe creation and God's natural beauty and can't help but feel kind of small.

And God has not only considered humanity as a part of creation, but given us a privileged place in creation. Ephesians tells us that we are God's masterpiece, given the very image and creative spirit in our souls that was present at the formation of the universe. We carry in us the mark of the creator, and part of that identity is to make and create.

Creation of art and beauty connects us with God, with whom we become co-creators. When we express ourselves through music, dance, painting, poetry, woodwork, or create processes for how to best accomplish our goals, we are not just making something beautiful or

useful, but we are expressing our creative spark as those who have been made in the image of God, creator of the heavens and earth.

Now, we realize that we are not God, and we are not capable of creating something from nothing, as God has done with all around us. Meghan reminded us on Epiphany, that even the most rich and powerful among humanity still never be able to hang even one star in the sky. It would be hard to compare the wonders of creation with something made by human hands. Marc Chagall, an artist with Russian and French nationality, said it this way:

“Art is the increasing effort to compete with the beauty of flowers – and never succeeding.”

And while our art and beauty may fall short of God’s creation, our capacity to create is a gift of the divine. We have been given gifts and inspiration that cause us to interpret and create beauty and art that can inspire and challenge.

In 1999, Pope John Paul II wrote a letter to artist. The subscript of the letter was **“To all who are passionately dedicated to the search for new “epiphanies” of beauty so that through their creative work as artists they may offer these as gifts to the world.**

In the letter, the Pope had this to say:

God therefore called man into existence, committing to him the craftsman’s task. Through his “artistic creativity” man appears more than ever “in the image of God”, and he accomplishes this task above all in shaping the wondrous “material” of his own humanity and then exercising creative dominion over the universe which surrounds him. With loving regard, the divine Artist passes on to the human artist a spark of his own surpassing wisdom, calling him to share in his creative power.

Through the gifts of creativity, we find ourselves tapping into the creative work that God has given to us through God’s divine and creative image, called to share in the creative work of God. We discover that we carry beauty and art within us because we have been marked in the image of an infinitely beautiful and wonderful creator. Marc Chagall, who I quoted earlier, also said this “Mozart never composed anything, ever! He copied what was written on his soul.”

This begins to get at the idea that the capacity to create beauty and bring to life art and wonder has been with us since our beginning, and indeed since the beginning of creation itself.

A word here to say that when I say creating art, I don't mean that if you are not able to paint like Rembrandt, or compose like Mozart, or sculpt like Michelangelo, then there is no point and you should just give up. When I say creating art, there is not to be a value judgment of "good" or "bad." Rather, when I say art, I mean being able to express how you see the world." That can be through art, poetry, dance, or creating order in spreadsheets. (Remember creation was God making beauty from chaos!) All of these acts are beautiful and art in that it taps into that same creative spirit that God has breathed into each of us.

And when we do create, when we share our gift with each other and all of creation, and we can begin to feel that connection in a very real way. Sharing gifts of beauty and art can connect us across language, culture, time and context. Just remember my opening image. I have often found myself wearing the same shirt as others before. And yet, I don't tell those stories decades later. The connection of art and beauty creates a lasting connection. So please, share your gifts, share your beauty with the world. We need it, as we are all connected.

Joan Chittister, is an American [Benedictine](#) nun, theologian, author,¹and speaker. Says it this way, *"The human-centered view of creation is a stunted one. It fails to recognize the oneness of creation, the symphony of life forms that depend on one another to bring the universe, pulsing and throbbing with life, to a wholeness that is mutual, that reflects the full face of God rather than simply our own."*

Each of us was made in the image of God, but each of us sees the world differently. Each of us has a perspective of the divine that is uniquely ours, and so if we desire to see God more fully, we must rely on each other to share our experiences of beauty, joy, pain and beauty.

If we were to deny the beauty of someone else, we are limiting ourselves as well as our ability to see God. We need each other because we share an interconnectedness that, like beauty, we can't perhaps fully explain, but it is very palpable.

On this Martin Luther King, Jr. weekend, I share the Reverend Doctor's words that capture this vision of divine interweaving.

Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere. We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly. Never again can we afford to live with the narrow, provincial "outside agitator" idea. - MLK

We glimpse this connected mutuality, this holy kinship, when we are overcome with the beauty of creation, the beauty of art, and the beauty found in those moments when we are reminded that there is more to the world than just ourselves.

And just so Not just some sort of sentimental feel good thing to say that art connects us.

“Communal joy provides a kind of glue that unifies a group. When psychologists study people engaged in communal singing, dance, or other rhythmic forms of entertainment, they find that we become connected on a physical level. Choir singers heart rates synchronize; musicians playing the same riff have brain waves that line up. These experiences of synchrony create a physiological experience of community, one that can be profoundly unconscious. Studies show that even when strangers move or vocalize together, they become more generous, more altruistic, and more willing to sacrifice their own needs for the good of the group.”

Beauty is not only good for our souls, it may also be good for our physical health as well.

Friends, lets be those who recognize our place in creation and our roles as co-creators with God. Let us be those who recognize the beauty of our creator as we discover the beauty and divine creative spirit in ourselves.

So go and make the world a more beautiful place. This day and forever more.

In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen
