

WGUMC May 19, 2013 Pentecost Sunday
Genesis 1:1-5, 26-27; John 3:1-8 "Give Me Back My Crayons"

I have an artist friend back in Oregon. She is a deacon in the UMC and her gift for ministry is in spirituality and the arts. Whenever she leads an adult retreat, she always begins with a tragic story. It's about how someone told you or you told yourself around the age of nine or ten that you have no artistic talent. One day, you stopped seeing or stopped putting your drawings on the refrigerator, and on that day, you stopped believing you are an artist.

Cartoonist Hugh MacLeod tells it this way: "Everyone is born creative; everyone is given a box of crayons in kindergarten. Then when you hit puberty they take the crayons away and replace them with dry, uninspiring books on algebra, history, etc. Being suddenly hit years later with the 'creative bug' is just a wee voice telling you, 'I'd like my crayons back, please.'" [MacLeod, *Ignore Everybody: And 39 Other Keys to Creativity*]

Everyone is born creative. But what exactly is creativity? You'll tell me that you can't even draw a stick figure. And what's more, you don't really want to. But I tell you that creativity goes way, way beyond crayons, canvases and modeling clay. As writer Madeleine L'Engle says, "creativity is a way of living life, no matter our vocation or how we earn our living." [L'Engle, *Walking on Water*]

Steve Jobs was no artist in the conventional sense, but there was real art in his life's work. And this is what he said about it: "Creativity is just connecting things. When you ask creative people how they did something, they feel a little guilty because they didn't really do it, they just saw something. It seemed obvious to them after a while. That's because they were able to connect experiences they've had and synthesize new things."

Can you see something no one else sees? Can you connect experiences in new ways? Are you creative?—which is the same as asking, Are you human?

Genesis 1 tells us that God is the Creator of the heavens and the earth. It also says that, male and female, we were created in the image of God, which makes us creators, too. Perhaps not everyone is currently living according to their true nature. Born in the flesh, some of us are stuck there. So, we need the Spirit to call us back to the being we were created to be, to awaken in us something that has gone to sleep, enliven in us something that has been too long dead.

Jesus, in the Gospel of John, argues that in order to see the kingdom, in order to reclaim the image of God in us, in order to fulfill our potential as artists of the new creation, we need to be born of the Spirit. We need to be in touch with the One who is always present in every act of creation.

Survey the Bible and you'll see the Holy Spirit blowing all the way through it. There is the Spirit in Genesis One: "At the beginning of God's creating of the heavens and the earth, when the earth was wild and waste, darkness over the face of Ocean, rushing spirit of God hovering over the face of the waters—" [Everett Fox's translation] Some translations describe that beginning as a great void, an emptiness, and I like to picture God, paintbrush in hand, pondering a huge blank canvas, and here comes the Holy Spirit on the wings of morning to fill up the imagination with all the wonderful possibilities on this first day of creation.

There is the Spirit in Exodus, making a bush burst into flame and calling out to Moses in Midian to go down to Egypt and set my people free. And there She is again in the pillar of fire and smoke as Moses leads this group of whiners and complainers out of Egypt, through the Red Sea and into the wilderness to create there a holy community. [Exodus 13:21]

There is the Spirit in I Samuel, anointing David to be king over all Israel and Judah and, out of twelve squabbling tribes, creating a new nation. [I Samuel 16:13]

In the New Testament, there is the Holy Spirit in Luke's Gospel, first in Mary's womb, then as the dove descending upon Jesus at his baptism, and then again in the synagogue in Nazareth—conceiving, blessing and anointing the One in whom the whole world is recreated. [Luke 1:35; 3:22; 4:18]

Jesus promised that when he was lifted up, the Holy Spirit would come down, and the Book of Acts tells the story of how the Holy Spirit was poured out on the apostles on the day of Pentecost, creating the spirit-filled community we call Church [Acts 2]

Lord knows that the community has not always been so spirit-filled, and so through the ages, the Spirit has had to come down again and again to recreate the Church. This coming Friday is the 275th anniversary of John Wesley's famous

conversion experience in London, England. That was the day when the Holy Spirit came down and strangely warmed his heart during a gathering at a house on Aldersgate Street. Later, Wesley would regard the Methodist movement he was leading as a sign of a new Pentecost, a new creation of the Church for his day and time.

Friends, it's now past time for another Pentecost. We need the Spirit to come down to help us see something that has been here for us all along, to help us make some new connections and synthesize some new things. But what needs to happen in the Church also needs to happen in our hearts and in our lives.

Paul's first letter to the people of Thessalonica is the first letter that we have from him. It is the earliest writing in the New Testament, written about 51 C.E., still in the first generation after the resurrection of Christ and that first

Pentecost. But already, Paul is warning them: "Do not quench the Spirit." [I Thessalonians 5:19]

Oh, how often have we done just that! And it's time to stop it! You were created in the image of God and the Holy Spirit is here, ready and waiting, to recreate your life, to make of you a great work of art. The problem is that we keep giving away our crayons or letting others take them away. But when we do that, we stifle the Spirit inside of us. We murder something that God made for us.

Martha Graham, the great dancer and choreographer, said "There is a vitality, a life force, an energy, a quickening that is translated through you into action, and because there is only one of you in all time, this expression is unique. And if you block it, it will never exist through any other medium and will be lost."

In other words, "Do not quench the Spirit." Don't be guilty of the crime of killing the creativity that God put in you. Take

the crayon we gave you home with you. Don't lose it, because that crayon is to remind you that you are the artist of your life. When you are born of the Spirit, you will be able to recreate it, by seeing new possibilities where there were only old problems, and by making new connections where there was only the same ol' conventional wisdom.

And you can apply that newborn ability to see things to your work, to your marriage, to your caregiving, to your friendships, your finances, and your faith. This Pentecost, the Holy Spirit is giving you a clean slate, a blank canvas, and you can color yourself into a new way of living in God's new creation.

I had wanted to end this sermon with a poem about creativity. But guess what, at 1 a.m. this morning, I wasn't feeling too creative! The Spirit had already gone to bed for the night. Then it dawned on me that today is the 20th anniversary of my own personal Pentecost. Twenty years ago today, I was

in the hospital having a right temporolobectomy (brain surgery) to cure my epilepsy. During the ensuing recovery, I experienced a big burst of creativity and started writing poetry. At the time, I didn't know if the surgery was going to work, but I had no doubt God was working on me. So, I wrote this poem about how the Spirit of God was recreating me. Today, I thank God for 20 years of being seizure free and thank you for letting me share this with you.

Strange and wonderful
to emerge from a fog
of IV's and needles, pills and pain,
to find parents at the bedside,
cards and flowers everywhere,
the love I never questioned,
and the love I never knew was there.

Strange and wonderful
to come home again,
to commune in worship again,
to meet you, God, again.

Strange and wonderful
to be full to bursting now
with shapeless hopes
and soundless song,
sermon piled upon silent sermon

and endless, petition-less prayer.

Strange and wonderful
this movement deep down that is going...somewhere,
this bursting through the surface,
 impenetrably still for some many years,
this excess of emotion, freed from imperious pain,
this storehouse of gratitude only freed by tears.

Strange and wonderful
to be so shaken loose
that I don't know how to "be."
It's all I can do to remember my name.
I claim no failure or success...only difference
and a life that will never be the same.

Strange and wonderful
to be here
now.