

Rebecca Rouillard

[Value 5] We embrace creative expression

We serve a creative God and believe that each of us is empowered by the Holy Spirit to express ourselves creatively in worship and service. We will celebrate the uniqueness and diversity of Christ's body by creating space for innovation and creativity in our midst.

Introduction

Here's a clip from the talk "Jesus, the Cross & the power of God" NT Wright gave a while back at the Salt & Light Leaders Conference:

We have lived for too long with the arts as the pretty bit around the edge and with the reality as a non-artistic thing in the middle. But the world is charged with the grandeur of God, why should we not celebrate and rejoice in that. And the answer sometimes is, because the world is sometimes also a very messy and nasty and horrible place. Some artists make a living out of representing the world as a very ugly and wicked and horrible place. And our culture has slid in both directions: so that we've got sentimental art on the one hand and brutalist art on the other. If you want to find sentimental art, tragically, the churches are often a good place to look. As people when they want to paint religious pictures, screen out the nasty bits. But genuine art, I believe, take seriously the fact that the world is full of the glory of God and that it will be full as the waters cover the sea and at present (Romans 8) it is groaning in travail. Genuine art responds to that triple awareness of what is true - the beauty that is there, of what will be true - the ultimate beauty and of the pain of the present, and holds them together as the Psalms do, and asks, "why and what and where are we?" And you can do that in music and you can do it in painting. And our generation needs us to do that, not simply to decorate the gospel but to announce the gospel. Because again and again, when you can do that you open up hermeneutic space for people whose minds were so closed by secularism that they just literally cannot imagine any other way of the world being. I have debated in public in America with colleagues in the New Testament Guild who refuse to believe in the bodily resurrection and again and again the bottom line is when they say "I just can't imagine that." The answer is, "Smarten up your imagination." And the way to do that is not to beat them over the head with dogma but to create a world of mystery and beauty and possibility...like listening to a piece of music that, after you have listened to it, it is much easier to say "I believe in the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit" than before you heard it. Maybe there are artists here today who are going to do that for your local community or maybe for the country, maybe for the world...in what you write, in what you play, in what you paint, in what you sculpt, in what you dream and turn into reality.

- There are no scriptures on "creativity". It is not something that Jesus spoke about to the Beatitudes or one of those important "last words" Paul communicated to the church before he was martyred.

- I don't want to pull out obscure scriptures from the Old Testament about the artisans in the temple or the musicians in the army. Creativity is inherent in the nature of scripture itself and in the character of God.

Genesis 1:1-3

¹ In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. ² Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters.

³ And God said, "Let there be light," and there was light.

I would like to pull three things out of this scripture:

1. God is the Creator and we are created in his image.

- God is creative

Psalm 102:25

"In the beginning you laid the foundations of the earth, and the heavens are the work of your hands."

- We are created in his image - therefore we have creativity within us already

Genesis 1:27

²⁷ So God created human beings in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.

- We are being transformed into his likeness – therefore we need to release our creativity

2 Corinthians 3:17-18

¹⁷ Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. ¹⁸ And we all, who with unveiled faces contemplate the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his image with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.

- We are ALL creative.

In our process of being transformed into the likeness of God, we don't have an option of leaving some parts out. In the same way as we cannot leave anything else out: "I'm not a very compassionate person, I will leave it to others to do the compassionate things." We are all called to compassion and we are all called to creativity. Not everyone can draw or sing or write, but we are all creative.

Show pics from Thursday night. These are not by artists.

- There is something about the beauty of creation that draws people to God. He reveals himself through his creation:

Romans 1:20

²⁰ For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that people are without excuse.

- Therefore surely he is also revealed through the things that we create:

[see Cummings poem - "I thank You God for most this amazing"](#)

This poem speaks about seeing God in creation but the poem itself also helps me to see God in the way it is written.

2. The Holy Spirit enables the Creative Process

- The Holy Spirit was there at the beginning – hovering over the waters.
- Life By the Spirit

In Galatians there is a passage in chapter five entitled "Life by the Spirit". (In chapter eight of Romans there is another called "Life Through the Spirit".) The title is not "Worship by the Spirit" or even "Meetings by the Spirit", it is Life by the Spirit. The implication is that the Holy Spirit empowers and inspires us in every area of our lives. We often reduce the usefulness of the Holy Spirit to the spiritual gifts alone. If we are not seeing miracles and healings we believe the Spirit is not moving. I believe the Holy Spirit is involved in every area of our lives, even the boring mundane things, and he empowers us to do everything better – whether that is worship or whether it is administration.

- Creativity is inspired by the Spirit

I have a problem with prayer meetings. My problem is that, often, as the Holy Spirit's presence starts to move amongst us, I get creatively inspired. I think of song lyrics I want to write, pictures I want to paint, photos I want to take. Some might say I should stop getting distracted and focus on prayer, but I really believe all the creativity I have is inspired by the Holy Spirit and as such it is a gift to the body so I need to take it seriously and steward my gift well. Just so you know, ["The spirits of the prophets are subject to the control of the prophets" \(1 Corinthians 14:32\)](#) - I don't leave the prayer meeting to go and paint a painting, but I might quickly jot down my idea so I can follow it up later.

3. The Bible is Creative

- The idea of communicating with stories and images is not a new one nor is it unique to the post-modern era. The Bible itself is not a rule book but a narrative and Jesus often communicated in parables rather than commands and directions. Jesus was creative in the ways he explained things to people. Sometimes people had to work a bit harder to understand what he was saying sometimes he was so direct it caught them off guard.
- The Bible is also full of beautiful language and evocative imagery. This is not just the translator being creative.

[Genesis 1:1-2:](#)

[TNIV](#)

¹ In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. ² Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters.

Amplified Version

¹IN THE beginning God (prepared, formed, fashioned, and) created the heavens and the earth.²The earth was without form and an empty waste, and darkness was upon the face of the very great deep. The Spirit of God was moving (hovering, brooding) over the face of the waters.

King James Version

¹In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth. ²And the earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters.

The Message (Ok – this one is the translator being creative!)

¹⁻²First this: God created the Heavens and Earth—all you see, all you don't see. Earth was a soup of nothingness, a bottomless emptiness, an inky blackness. God's Spirit brooded like a bird above the watery abyss.

- There is a lot of poetry in the Bible

If we separate the books of the Bible into 3 categories: History Books, Books of Poetry/Prophecy/Song and Gospels & Epistles then the Bible is made up of 43% history, 22% gospels and epistles and 35% poetry, prophecy and song. It's quite a large proportion. And this doesn't include all the moments of poetry included in the history, gospels and epistles.

- There is a reason for this: (Unlike all the songs in Lord of the Rings)

["How to Read the Bible for all its worth" – Gordon D. Fee & Douglas Stuart](#)
pg. 197-198

The Creative way a lot of the Bible is written is both beautiful and useful. There is value in poetry.

I hope I have convinced you that creativity is important, but how do we use it in church?

Practical Application

How do we use creativity in the church? Not to decorate tracts...I believe there are four main areas:

1. Creative Worship

- Worship is a sacrifice/offering. Worship is not about us. It is for God not us. The question is not, did you enjoy it, but did God enjoy it. What have you brought to God in worship, what did you bring to offer God today? Is it a song, a word, a poem, a dance, an amount of money, some of your time, serving excellently in practical ways in the church (eg. sound desk). It's not about singing songs. It is your response to God. Ultimately we need to offer everything to God. Not just singing. ["Therefore I urge you brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God - this is your spiritual act of worship."](#)
[Romans 12:1](#)

- Melville Junction history – "Drawing in Church"

- Worshiping with Images (Decoration vs. Revelation) eg. Background pics to words
- Performance vs. Participation eg. One person painting vs. all painting, Graphic Design worship, Bloem Giant Flags
- Corporate Worship vs. Personal Worship – Corporate Worship is important
- 4 Images of the Spirit Worship Event

2. Prophetic Art

- "Prophetic Art" refers to representing prophesy visually but also the concept that restoring art to the church or "redeeming the arts" is a prophetic action in itself. God is restoring for himself a beautiful bride, glowing with vitality and creativity!
- The prophetic is a very exciting gift to experience and yet a prophetic word is often forgotten shortly after it has been given. We need to hold on to these words – particularly those spoken to the church. We take the prophetic to the next level when we record it creatively.
- Prophecy on the walls eg. Old Building Murals, New Building banners
- Art as a Prophetic Statement to the Community Eg. 2005 Exhibition – Prayer Walking around Melville
- Illustrating Prophetic Seasons in the church Eg. Transformation Event (The Green Church)
- Prophetic Actions – Morocco - Building City Walls

3. Creative Communication

- One way to ensure you get people's attention is by using humour – if you make people laugh your message will be so much more memorable.
- "Form follows function" (architecture) – we don't sacrifice the communication for the sake of the creativity (lessons learned from working in advertising)
- It is also "creative" to find practical solutions to communication problems – eg. Homegroup Directions Cards
- Providing visual images helps people to imagine things better eg. Images of a King photos
- We can use creativity to enhance people's understanding of scripture eg. The Message, Isaiah 61 poem
- Enhances Teaching eg. What I'm doing right now
- Enhances Theme eg. Fruit of the Spirit Event
- Technology is great but not essential to creativity! eg. Mac vs. PC Don't feel limited by your technology!

4. Creative Evangelism

- Know your Target Market

A lot of Christians don't like the idea of us marketing ourselves to the world. Evangelism should be Spirit-led and as such should have nothing to do with target-markets, branding, marketing strategy and the like. But surely our communication will be more effective if we speak the language of those we are communicating with – the Holy Spirit engineered this on the Day of Pentecost. Sometimes we might actually be speaking the same language but our Christian jargon is so entwined in our speech that non-Christians have no idea what we are actually saying. It is the same principle to creatively tailor our gospel presentation to suit the audience who are to receive it. The Bible commands us to be “as shrewd as snakes and as innocent as doves” (Matthew 10:16) and tells us that Paul became “all things to all people so that by all possible means I might save some” (1 Corinthians 9:22). We have to present the gospel, the question is whether we present it badly or well. (It's like claiming not to like theology – there is good theology and bad theology – having no theology is not an option.)
Eg. Mainly Music

- Loving your Community

Often our problem is not presenting the gospel but finding the people to present it to. The kind of people we want to reach are often those who would never dream of setting foot inside a church, so we need to come up with creative ways to get out there and find them.
Eg. Beer for Jesus

- Getting Out There

Using Community Space eg. Bamboo Art Exhibitions

- Using Calendar Dates Eg. World AIDS Day
- Using Church Calendar Dates Eg. Stations of the Cross
- Cross-Cultural Ministry Eg. Stations in Egypt

Conclusion

Why am I telling you about this stuff?

- So you know where we've come from, so you know why we value creativity and how that has been a part of Melville Junction for the past 7 years.
- Also so you are inspired to be creative in your own life and to share your creativity with the church – in whatever form that may take.
- Creativity is not just about doing fun events at church sometimes. Creativity is about understanding God better, seeing more of him and creativity is about living your whole life in full colour:

John 10:10

“I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.”