

## “Let Us Make Humankind in Our Image”

Genesis 1:-2:4a

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When we were young, we'd often listen to our parents talking about other parents' children. Whenever there was a strong resemblance, either physically or ability-wise or in personality, the child would be said to be a “chip off the old block.” And that was always a compliment. To be noticed as having some of the same qualities as your mom or your dad was considered a plus, a good thing, something to celebrate! Even now, I'll hear someone say, “She got her mother's brains,” or “He got his father's good looks.” To be a “chip off the old block” was a good thing. I can sort of picture a huge block of oak wood on a carpenter's workbench: strong and sturdy and known for its integrity. Beside the huge block is a little Lego-sized piece of oak carrying the same enduring characteristics.

So, when I read through the Creation story in the first chapter of Genesis, what I notice is the phrase, “Let us make humankind in our image.” Modern translation: ‘let us make humankind as a chip off the old block.’ Let us make boys and girls, men and women to reflect the very nature of God. They won't be gods and goddesses; but they will reflect something of the Divine identity.

I happen to believe that God is a force of good in the universe. This is why I believe in the innate goodness of every human being. We may do bad things occasionally, but we are god-like, good, at the core.

What we witness in the Creation story is an intensely creative God. God is a potter who scoops up a handful of clay and fashions it into a human figure and then breathes the breath of life into its soul, calling it to life. I'm no art teacher, but I give that one an A Plus! God is an artist who takes whatever is available and creates beauty and light and creeping things and crawling things and says it is all good! God is a dancer who delights in the sounds and the rhythms of the universe. God is a poet whose use of the language of silence astounds me. God is a composer who generates symphonies played by angels. The most primal way God is revealed is through the spirit of creativity.

What this means, of course, is that everybody here is an artist! Everybody here has received the creative impulse. It's in the genes! Usually, when I say that, I see a lot of heads shaking a negative: 'not me, I'm no artist.' Well, I'm here to say: look again! We are all chips off the Old Block!

A local church is a community on a mission. One way to describe that mission is to support each other in the discovery of the form our creativity might take. When the creative juices are flowing, a church thrives! When the creative energy flows, a church flourishes. When the creative spirit is released and affirmed, watch out! Something new is about to be born.

In the Parable of the Prodigal Son, we see that the younger son has received his inheritance and has taken it to a far away country. The sadness is that he squanders his inheritance. He doesn't honor it or respect it or use it wisely. He squanders it. I would submit, that our inheritance has something to do with naming our creativity and then using it to build up the community of faith. Our creativity is our spiritual inheritance. May we not squander it!

A few weeks ago, many of us attended an evening of poetry shared by our Meeting House poets. Their passion and their well-turned phrases were like a rich banquet for the listeners. We left that night feeling healed and inspired and part of something greater than ourselves.

Last fall, Liz Smith, one of our members who is the middle school band director, discovered, and I still haven't found out how, that in 9<sup>th</sup> grade I had played the tenor saxophone. She brought me an instrument and a package of new number two reeds, and she told me when to show up for the rehearsal with the Joyful Noise Band! One doesn't say 'no' to Liz Smith. I had squandered my inheritance! And she helped me to reclaim it! I am grateful.

Creativity takes on many forms! I've heard of the concept of creative financing. I learned this week of a church that adds a theological spin to creative financing. Once a month, during Sunday worship, a family or an individual is presented with \$50 and is instructed to use that money during the next seven days to make a difference in someone's life, to translate the dollars into mission, no-strings attached. Then, on the following Sunday, that family shares the story of how they used the \$50 to advance God's love and what that had meant to them. I am certain that God smiles upon such creativity! I can almost hear God saying to the angels, with glee, "Yep, chips off the old block!" Thus, congregations are also made in the image of God.

I'd like us to take this notion seriously, that we are all artists of one sort or another. We won't all be joining the local art guild or auditioning for the next production at Hartford Stage or publishing a book of poetry. But we can all be on the lookout for signs of each other's creativity, and we can point to it when we recognize it. We can affirm it and nurture it. In this way, we build up the church family.

In this way, we celebrate the nature of our creation. In this way, we cultivate the ground for faith to take on new forms, for mission to take on new definition, for ministry to include more and more people.

For years, the adult mission group traipsed off to New Orleans or Galveston or Biloxi, but this year somebody got a little creative and suggested a new idea; New Haven, Connecticut, our own backyard. Because of that creative impulse, several people got involved who otherwise would have stayed home; because of that creative impulse, several day-trippers were able to put their faith into action; because of that creative impulse, a new model for adult mission is born! When we realize we're made in the image of the Creator, there's no end to the possibilities.

I'd like to end this sermon now by asking everyone here to say to two other people, "You are made in the image of God!" Could we do that right now, in the greatest of hope? Amen.