

Continuing Creativity

Isaiah 40: 21-31

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Prayer: We pray today in the words of St Augustine: Creator God, you are the light of the minds that know you, the joy of the hearts that love you, and the strength of the wills that serve you. Grant us to know you that we may truly love you, and so to love you that we may freely follow; with the creative substance of our own lives...



This drop of water frozen into a sphere appears to be a tiny world (you can imagine other realities) – it is formed for a moment, and then it will melt – once melted it could be nourishment for this plant it rests on, a drop in a stream, steam that warms in the sun, on its way to being a raindrop or snowflake once again. The natural world is infinitely creative with its resources in a constant state of growth, decline or rest. Growth and decline being two important and equal processes – keeping each other in balance.

If you have ever stood under a pine tree on a warm day, you know the aroma of the creative work of nature. Fixing nitrogen, creating oxygen, defensively preventing weeds around its base where its needles fall. As it grows it is a place of shelter for birds and animals, and as it dies it is a

source of food for insects and woodpeckers and other predators. All of this happens whether you know about it or not, whether you believe in it or not, you can linger a moment and appreciate the feel of sunshine the smell of a pine tree, breathing the piney air. Bearing witness to its gifts.

Many cultures celebrate the inner creative life in winter because so much of our outside life is limited in this season. Farmers need to let the land rest, winter sports replace temperate weather dependent ones, even my sourdough starter is growing more slowly in the cooler weather. Which means I forget about it a lot.

Isaiah is reminding his people that God created the earth from the void. God named this creation as a series of good days. As hardship created distance between God's creation and the people, they forgot the goodness – and yet God had never stopped enveloping them in the creativity and creative options.

Isaiah affirms that although his people have worshipped idols, still God is creating, God has created, God will continue to create -- because that is who God is: creativity itself. God continues to create anew, which gives our lives possibilities we may not have imagined for ourselves. He says:

Have you not known? Have you not heard?
The Lord is the everlasting God,
the Creator of the ends of the earth.
God does not faint or grow weary;
God's understanding is unsearchable.
God gives power to the faint,
and strengthens the powerless.
Even youths will faint and be weary,
and the young will fall exhausted;
but those who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength,
they shall mount up with wings like eagles,
they shall run and not be weary,
they shall walk and not faint. (Isaiah 40:28-31)

The image of mounting up with wings like eagles is that of an eagle in flight, she will lean into the wind, and the wind will support her. That is the way she is.

My father-in-law who was a flight engineer in WW2 was very interested in the way that eagles and turkey buzzards fly here in Connecticut. When he saw one in the air he would stop and admire it, call our attention to it. Something I used to see, but not pay attention to. He used to say that they were playing, riding the thermal updrafts....as they rose higher and higher. What are they doing? They are not hunting, they are not socializing or raising their young, they are creatively engaging the world of an eagle, leaning into their reality – a reality which involves an awareness of thermal updrafts. A reality invisible and impossible to us. Perhaps you have seen them, solitary, way up in the sky, going higher... creatively experimenting with what is possible in the life of an eagle, and then turning in a new direction and flying out and away.

Wind is the same word in Hebrew as breath and Spirit – *ruah*. We are encouraged in this image to lean into the Spirit's work around us, (like a thermal updraft) the Spirit as our native and natural space. Going with it, allowing it to support us and trusting its good work, and then using it to take action, when the time is right.

One of the books which has influenced me in our series this winter on creativity is Howard Thurman's book, *The Creative Encounter: An Interpretation of Religion and the Social Witness*¹. Thurman is now recognized as one of the major thinkers behind the civil rights movement, not one of the leaders on the front lines, but someone whose speaking and writing influenced the generation of leaders like Bernard Lafayette and of course, the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. His chapter headings in *The Creative Encounter* are:

1. The Inwardness of Religion
2. The Outwardness of Religion
3. The Inner Need for Love
4. The Outer Necessity for Love

¹ *The Creative Encounter: An Interpretation of Religion and Social Witness* by Howard Thurman, Friends United Press edition pub 1972

One of Thurman's legacies is the cultivation of a deep inner life, not to be self-absorbed, but so that you'll have something to carry you through your work in the world. The inner work is reflected in the outer work, and the outer work is recharged – creatively – by the inner work. That is the creative encounter – the encounter of our souls with the world and the world with our souls. Social Witness for Thurman, what we call “racial and social justice” is a creative act.

So I'd like to conclude today with a reminder and a question. The reminder is from Isaiah: God is infinitely creative. The creative process isn't over, it is going on all around us, and yes, within us. If you were to lean into creativity, the breath or headwind of the Spirit of God itself, where will your creativity take you? What will hold you up? Trust the Spirit, and lean into a creative encounter in your own precious life. There are so many opportunities ahead, most of which are invisible, but they are there and they are coming. This is the Spirit's work. It is creative.

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