

As One At 10 - 16th August 2020

'Creativity and Orthodoxy'

Good morning. It's great to have you with us as we continue to explore our vision and values as a church. We believe that God is calling us to thrive for the display of His splendour and I honestly think that something of what we're reflecting on today going to help us get there.

Something in God's creativity and orthodoxy. For you see the rootedness of God's truth, God's orthodoxy can keep us standing firm. And the endlessly expansive creative nature of God can awake a blossoming and a fruitfulness in us

So let's start with the rootedness of God's orthodoxy.

Orthodoxy is a funny word that simply means 'right belief'. Scholar George Weigel stresses, "Ideas have consequences and bad ideas can have lethal consequences... Ideas are not intellectual toys." Rich Nathan, author of 'Both And' says, "What we believe matters. Truth matters." He goes on, "[Orthodoxy]... is the idea that certain statements can accurately embody the truth as it is revealed in Christ and the Bible."

And that's what we're after, genuine truth as we find it in Jesus and the Bible.

I think orthodoxy is like a 3-legged stool.

- Our first leg is about being faithful to scripture, where God is most clearly revealed to us. Think about those eye-witness testimonies of Jesus,. What about the accounts of the early church living by the Spirit? Think about the faithfulness of God throughout the Old Testament. There's also the improbable, yet fulfilled promises of the Old Testament. And how do we hold fast to God's promises for the kingdom to come? Our first leg is about being faithful to scripture.
- Our second leg is about holding to those timeless faith statements; those carefully crafted creeds, to deep doctrine and dogma and gleaning from the great tradition of Christianity
- Our third leg is about listening to the discerning, Spirit-led body of today's Church

Construct ourselves an orthodoxy on these three things

- Scripture
- Tradition
- Body of Christ

and we will find ourselves sat on a sturdy stool.

There we can find a truth that will set us free from sins, temptations, addictions. We will find a truth that purifies us. We will find a truth that rescues us and protects us from evil. We will find a true light, a true bread, a true vine.... An authentic Jesus

Take one leg away and our sense of orthodoxy is likely to get out of balance, out of kilter and perhaps our true picture of God will collapse.

The composer of 'Faithful One', Brian Doerksen, shared recently on how he feels his faith is constantly undergoing renovation. He penned, "You are my rock in times of trouble... all through the storm" And that rock, that foundation has in no way changed.

But perhaps the damp gets into the roof. Or we've burst a pipe with a nail. Or we unknowingly started to knock down one of the weight-bearing walls. Perhaps we might need some renovation.

This is where creativity is not in conflict with orthodoxy. It is not about relocation away from the rock - it is about renovation.

Our Bible reading this morning tells us that, "In him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities..." (Colossians 1:17)

- Our solid ground, our firm foundation stays the same.
- Our Bible is the same. Our creeds are the same.
- Our salvation, our resurrection stay the same.
- Our Alpha, omega, beginning and end, Saviour, Father, our Lord, our hope, our greatest companion stays the same.

Paul goes on to say that Christ is before all things, and in him all things hold together" (Colossians 1:17)

When we create, we never start completely from scratch. We are always working what God has put in our hands. Only He is before all things; the uncreated one; the spark, who can form anything out of nothing. And yet, in the garden of Eden with a handful of dust and on a hillside with Jesus in body and blood... God shows us how you can create hope and beauty from in any given situation.

Let's read again, "For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross. (Colossians 1:19-20)"

Swedish film director Ingmar Bergman supposed that without orthodoxy, without a desire to celebrate God and root ourselves in who He really is, life loses its basic creative drive altogether. Our renovation allows us to display the splendour of God in renewed and realigned ways, where every door, floor, window, chimney, architectural detail above the ground points to God.

The story goes that Michelangelo walked into the Sistine Chapel one day as his assistants were marking out the ceiling and uttered one word, "amplius"... Magnify, make bigger. Expand our picture of how great God is. That's what creativity can do.

God's endlessly expansive creative nature awakes a blossoming and fruitfulness that can change our world.

As Jon Tyson describes it, I can live as part of God's creative minority, seeking to partner with Him in seeing all things new (Revelation 21).

- Where I won't put my pennies towards businesses who traffic God's children.
- Where my vegetables aren't shipped from Argentina
- Where I steward what God has given me. Take those resources and care for them wisely and share them freely.
- Where unnecessary rot and rust are no longer acceptable and my black bin bag is as empty as can be at the end of two weeks.
- Where I use my voice on social media for good and not to grump or gossip
- Where I am prepared to say sorry and see a relationship restored

Erwin Raphael McManus, pastor of a church brimming with creativity writes, "There is no proof of creativity without action." I know this can be so scary. To stand out. To be that creative minority. To take risks and risk failure. To get creative and take a different route to the world around us. McManus goes on, "We live in fear of failure, convinced that failure will prove us to be frauds... To make our lives a creative act is to marry ourselves to risk and failure."

Henri Matisse is someone who strikes me as deadlocked on being creative no matter what. He once said, "Creativity takes courage." And when abdominal cancer left him chair and bed-bound, still he continued, creating world famous collages with the most striking colours and shapes. Creativity takes courage.

During my time at art college it felt like the general approach was to be a philosopher, a social commentator, to adopt shock tactics, to conceptualise, to sensationalise. But there were a few of us who were artisans, craftsmen, aestheticians, champions of beauty. And we got relatively encouragement from our tutors. They didn't give us much time because they did not value our approach. I didn't feel trusted and I dreaded the criticism when they'd come to my corner of the studio and looked over my shoulder.

When I was at school my art teachers were my champions. I felt trusted. I felt a freedom to take risks and not to do like the other students. I felt celebrated. I even had a few students coming to me to ask about my work and for some tips. Three of us in that class got amongst the highest marks in the country for our Fine Art A-level.

John Lassiter, a founding member of Pixar, is renowned as one of the best storytellers in film of his generation. He was so good at hosting meetings in such a way that the orthodoxy was never lost - that the key themes in the story were never compromised, and yet risks were encouraged and every voice was valued. Yet still Pixar spent decades developing a creative culture that's free from fear. And they have made plenty of mistakes a long the way, including scrapping months of work on Toy Story 2, laying off the entire team and starting again.

But God is an infinitely better teacher than than John Lassiter or any of my art tutors. He has not made a mistake when he unrolled us in his apprenticeship. He has been tutoring his children to be creative for millennia and He trusts us. He isn't in the business of

sacking or making anyone redundant. He is at our side when we take risks and He sees every detail. He knows what we are working with. "All things", as it says in our reading today, "were made through him and for him." He guides us, He listens, He reproaches and He celebrates.

And it's all towards a bigger story. The Bible tells us that our lives are for the display of His splendour (Isaiah 61:3) and that all the nations can see the glory of the King, the light of the Lord through us (Isaiah 60). So as Paul compels us in verse 22, let's "continue in our faith, established and firm, and do not move from the hope held out in the gospel."

Father, thank You that You have called us in Your creative school and You entrust us as servants of Your gospel message. By Your Spirit, give us the courage to get creative and to renovate on Your solid ground. And I pray for anyone who's feeling the weight of being a creative minority. Lord, that they would know Your tutelage, Your encouragement, Your celebration as they step out. Amen.