

Art and Soul

Friday 17th - Sunday 19th July, 2015.

Well, we hope you're having a great time and really discovering something new about the ways that its possible to express your faith through being creative.

The thing is we're all on a journey and we process things in different ways...because we're all different. One of the great things about having time like this - when you can step back from the 'stuff of life' is that it gives us the opportunity to look at things in a fresh way...a different way. I was watching the 'One Show' on BBC this week when viewers were introduced to a young man called Will Sutton. Now Will lives on the Isle of Man...and if I were to ask you what's the one thing above all else that the Isle of Man is known for...Motorcycling right! Well Will Sutton wanted to present the place he lives in, in a different way...he wanted people to look at the island with different eyes...he is looking for a way to express what's going on inside him...you might say 'Finding his voice'.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kwxQ9cyen64> (4m21secs)

Il've been involved in art education for most of my life. In the main, this interest has focused on painting, graphic design, printmaking, photography and so on...you get the idea. As a teacher, but also as a Christian, my aim has always been to enable people to fulfil their potential.

Marcel Pagnol (one of the greatest French writers of the 20th century) once said...'The reason people find it so hard to be happy is that they always see the past better than it was, the present worse than it is and the future less resolved than it might be'.

The result of this perception is that as an individual our potential is unfulfilled. It creates an inexplicable sense of longing which cannot be easily satisfied. Erwin McManus (the lead pastor of Mosaic Church - a Christian community in Los Angeles) says that 'this longing is rooted in one singular characteristic that distinguishes humans from all other species...the imagination'. The imagination is our greatest strength and our greatest weakness. When we imagine but do not create we are left with an overwhelming sense of dissatisfaction.

Let me tell you a story I heard last week about a church leader in the south east who decided to raise the profile of creativity in his church . He advertised an exhibition to be held in the church to enable all those 'gifted' individuals in the congregation the opportunity to show their work. The day came when work was due to be handed in and bit by bit work started to come in. One morning when he arrived at his office there was a large object on his desk, wrapped in black polythene. On picking it up it was immediately apparent that it was extremely heavy...but obviously something which had the form of a picture frame. On opening the black polythene bag he was faced with the strangest of objects. In the middle of the frame was a highly ornate decorated iconic image of Jesus on the cross - the sort of thing you might expect to see in some of the Byzantine churches. But more strangely, fixed to a board all around this image were handles of all sorts of shapes and sizes...brass ones, wooden ones, steel ones, plastic ones...he was completely nonplussed. Moreover, there was no name on it...so he turned the framed object over and there it was...the title of the work of art...'Handel's Messiah'.

Genesis 1 vs. 27 says we are made in the image of God...'so God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him'.

I've thought about this with fresh eyes and ears over the last few days and have come to the conclusion that we are not just works of art, but artists at work...this is how God sees us.

Creativity...you've either got it or not, right? You're right brained or left brained...into art or computer science...a painter or a mathematician...Wrong!

Everyone is creative...think back to what you heard yesterday morning when Eric Johnson talked about the ways in which children are very free to express themselves often without inhibition. God gives us the capacity to come with ideas and bring these ideas to life...we are all creative...we just need to find out what it looks like! Creativity is hard wired into our DNA by God Himself. By being creative we show something of the character of God to those around us. In reflecting the image of God, we are 'imaging' Him to the rest of the world.

John Piper (Founder of desiringGod.org - now a well established author but formerly pastor of Bethlehem Church in Minneapolis write...'If you are God, your work is to create out of nothing. If you are not God, but like God i.e human, your work is to take what God has made, shape it and use it to reveal the character of God to others. God wants us to use the gifts He has given us to His glory!

So the big question is 'where do we begin?'

Ask yourself 'what is it that moves me? For some it may be a piece of music, for others it may be a work of art, a piece of prose or poetry, a photograph...the list is endless. For most of us making that first mark on the paper is what often prevents us from even beginning because we are afraid of failure. But no one said being creative is easy. T.S.Elliott once said 'Anxiety is the handmaiden of Creativity'. Its all part of lifelong journey or process. In taking those first few steps, ask yourself three questions :

1. What story are we telling?
2. What is the best way to tell the story
3. How do we tell the story with what we have?

Blaine Hogan (the Creative Director at Willow Creek Church outside Chicago) tells the story of his two year old daughter...

'My two year old daughter thinks every cardboard box is a school bus. Her story is that she wants to go for a ride to school. Well, what's the best way for her to do that? A school bus of course. Unfortunately our one bedroom plus den apartment doesn't have room for the object of her story (nor do we have the budget). What do we have plenty of though? Cardboard boxes from nappy shipments...tons of them. Suddenly we have parking lots filled with school buses.'

So you see, all of story telling is about belief. A good storyteller makes you believe in the world and the characters created...think of C.S.Lewis and the 'Tales of Narnia', think of Tolkien and 'Lord of the Rings' or 'the Hobbit'. But what does the bible say about this...lets look at Hebrews 11 vs. 1...

'Faith is confidence in what we hope for and the assurance of what we do not see.'

But as Christians, we are not just story tellers...we are story dwellers.

We were in New Zealand earlier this year and attended church with our family there. The talk that morning was the introduction to a new series titled 'Epic' and subtitled for the first in the series 'Why Story?'

Listen to mp3 (6m 17secs).

<http://www.rscg.co.nz/wp-content/uploads/sermon-manager-import/Richard-8Feb15.mp3>

Something is lost when we boil a story down to the simple facts...we lose sight of the big picture when we reduce it to the bullet points. Secular culture believes the way we understand the life we live is through a story...and the bible teaches us that the way we understand who Jesus is, who God is and how we are to live is through the story of God and His Kingdom...inasmuch we are not just story tellers, but story dwellers.

Now we all have a story to tell, and as part of my story over the last few weeks, one of the things I've been learning about is something called 'Synaesthesia' - a medical condition which involves the collision of the senses where the individual may 'hear colour' or 'see sound'.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KGYrBaK-JYI> (4m 45secs)

But there is a greater collision which as Christians we seek to deal with every day...on the one hand there is God who has no beginning or end...and then we have humanity...whom God delights in, and for whom He made the supreme sacrifice. In this, our responsibility is to find ways in which we can articulate this 'great collision' because the world needs authentic, real believers.

Listen to the Podcast by Eric Johnson (22m 6secs)

<http://podcasts.ibethel.org/en/podcasts/the-great-collision>

We need to seek ways to express what's going on inside us. Everyone is creative...its a lie to say that some people are and some are not...the question to which we seek an answer is 'what does it look like?

Ephesians 2 vs. 1-10 provides us with an adept summary...

Made Alive in Christ

1 As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, 2 in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient. 3 All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our flesh[a] and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature deserving of wrath. 4 But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, 5 made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved. 6 And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, 7 in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus. 8 For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God— 9 not by works, so that no one can boast. 10 For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.

This can be best summarised as...Life before...life during...and life after.

The ultimate truth is we are all on a journey, and this journey is one in which we seek 'find our voice'...the amazing truth of God living inside us'.