

Never-Ending Creativity

COMMUNION

February 7, 2021

Isaiah 40: 26-31

²⁶ Lift up your eyes on high and see: Who created these? He who brings out their host and numbers them, calling them all by name; because he is great in strength, mighty in power, not one is missing. ²⁷ Why do you say, O Jacob, and speak, O Israel, "My way is hidden from the LORD, and my right is disregarded by my God"? ²⁸ Have you not known? Have you not heard? The LORD is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He does not faint or grow weary; his understanding is unsearchable. ²⁹ He gives power to the faint and strengthens the powerless. ³⁰ Even youths will faint and be weary, and the young will fall exhausted; ³¹ 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.

1st Corinthians 9: 16-23

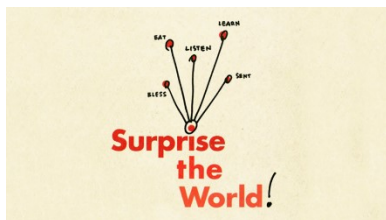
¹⁶ If I proclaim the gospel, this gives me no ground for boasting, for an obligation is laid on me, and woe to me if I do not proclaim the gospel! ¹⁷ For if I do this of my own will, I have a reward; but if not of my own will, I am entrusted with a commission. ¹⁸ What then is my reward? Just this: that in my proclamation I may make the gospel free of charge, so as not to make full use of my rights in the gospel. ¹⁹ For though I am free with respect to all, I have made myself a slave to all, so that I might win more of them. ²⁰ To the Jews I became as a Jew, in order to win Jews. To those under the law I became as one under the law (though I myself am not under the law) so that I might win those under the law. ²¹ To those outside the law I became as one outside the law (though I am

not free from God's law but am under Christ's law) so that I might win those outside the law. ²² To the weak I became weak, so that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all people, that I might by all means save some. ²³ I do it all for the sake of the gospel, so that I may share in its blessings.



As we begin today, I am so excited. I often speak about being light and love in the world, about seeking to share our faith, about meeting needs and helping others. Over

these last four weeks you have heard me speak about hearing our call, about finding our role to play in the body of Christ, about understanding the need to be the revelation of Christ in the world, about the creative ways that God finds to be in relationship with us, and about being creative in the ways that we seek to be in connection with others. I am excited because today we begin to get practical about how to implement and to actually accomplish these ideas.



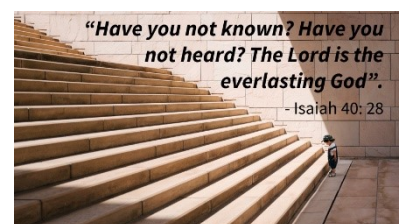
Today we begin to draw upon this book that guides us and teaches us some basic ways to be highly missional people. Using the passage from Isaiah 40 we will be

reminded of who and what our God is to us. Turning then to the 1st Corinthians 9 passage, Paul shares how he sought to bring the good news of Jesus to all people. Using this text, we will develop some ideas about how we could play that same role as we share our faith with others. Woven throughout will be some thoughts about how we are to live highly questionable lives. As we prepare to hear the message this morning, let us begin with a word of prayer...

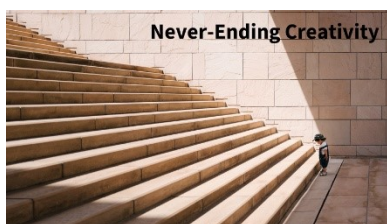


Please turn with me to Isaiah 40. Our passage begins with verse 26. In our first passage for this morning, Isaiah first harkens back to the beginning, back to when God created the world. As each day unfolds, God names what was created that day as “good”. Creation culminates with the creation of humanity, made in the image of God. This part of creation is deemed “very good”. As the years passed by, as many years passed, the people of God began to drift away from God, they began to forget God’s goodness. And yet God continued to be at work in the world, creating, renewing, restoring, redeeming. God’s never-ending creativity remained at work, faithfully in connection with creation and humanity.

In the middle section of the book, Isaiah speaks to a people who are weary, to a people who are downtrodden by their circumstances. They are living in exile under the oppressive rule of the Babylonians. Into this hard place, Isaiah speaks words of hope, reminding the Israelites that the One who created the universe is still the one who holds them under his wing. In verse 26 Isaiah invites the people to look heavenward, to look to the sky and stars and to remember that that God *“numbers them, calling them all by name”*. It is a reminder that God is great in strength and power. It is also a reminder that God knows each of them by name too. The prophet is reminding the people that God knows all things and understands all things – even how they are feeling in exile. In verse 28 Isaiah asks the people, *“Have you not known? Have you not heard? The Lord is the everlasting God”*. Therefore, God does not grow faint or weary.



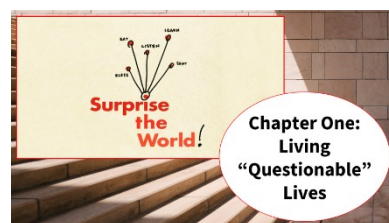
He then reminds them that God's understanding is "*unsearchable*". God knows their struggle. Last week the call was to be the epiphany, to be the revelation of Jesus' love in the world. As I thought about it this week, I wondered, as we live out our calling, as we seek to be the epiphany of Jesus Christ in the world, do we sometimes need to be reminded that this is our God too? As we face and live through struggles and trials, don't we need to remember where our creativity and strength and power is rooted? As we seek to reveal Christ to the world and as we ourselves go through our trials, do we always do so in the image of God? Do our creative acts sometimes seek to serve self or do they always serve the other and the community of faith?



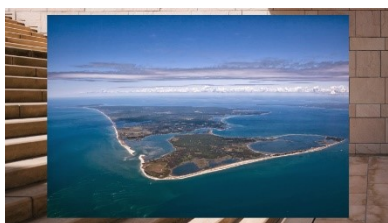
Just as God's creative acts did, so too should our creative acts give life – just like God did in the days when he spoke the world into being. Our creative acts should sustain life – just like God's did during the Israelites time in exile. When we look at our nation today, those in power claim to be creating life. Whether we like it or not, our political system tries to produce core values aimed at influencing how we are able to live and enjoy life. But those values are ever shifting, depending on which political party is in control. Therefore, we must be wary of buying in lock, stock, and barrel. Their values are not always life-giving and life-sustaining. With these values generated by the world, their characteristics are not steadfast and unchanging. When we try and root our core values as Christians in the policies and practices of a particular political party, then we are not standing on eternal ground.

Since we are created in God's image, we too are creators. As Isaiah reminds us of our creation story, we are also reminded that we are not God's equal. We are all a part of the broken humanity. Everything we do will not be "good" or "very good". Yet we are called to be in connection with God and with each other. Even if our attempts to create and to give life and to sustain life are not perfect, we are still called to strive to reflect God and these characteristics of God into our world. When we do dare to create with and for one another, something really amazing can happen. Whenever two or more gather in his name, coming together to share ideas and passions, excitement and creativity can fill the space, joining with the Holy Spirit to produce something new and exciting and powerful, something that can surprise the world.

God's creative process remains never-ending. God works both within our world and within each of us to build the kingdom here on earth. If we were to turn towards our communities and towards God, where could our creativity take us? What could it embody? What could it represent? Chapter One in this book is titled "Living 'Questionable' Lives". The main idea is that our lives should draw others to question why we live as we do. The questioning will allow us to engage in conversations about our faith. To be empowered to live questionable lives and to be equipped to have faith conversations, author Michael Frost believes that modern Christians must be propelled *outward* into the lives of our neighbors *AND* that we must be moved *inward* into a solid Christian community. In community we are equipped to speak conversationally about Jesus when answering questions about how and why we live as we do.



Looking at the Biblical model, Frost points out that ordinary Christians, people like you and me, devoted themselves to sacrificial acts of kindness. Christ himself and the early Christians that followed him willingly and sacrificially gave of themselves for the benefit of others. In doing so, they gave life and they sustained others in their trials and times of need.



Nantucket, Massachusetts, is located next to important shipping lanes running along the East Coast. Toward the end of the 1800s, sailing ships were in their heyday.

Nantucket Island saw hundreds of vessels passing by each day — all navigating without the advantages of modern technology. Treacherous shoals and stormy weather led to over 700 shipwrecks in the waters surrounding Nantucket, causing the area to be dubbed "a graveyard of the Atlantic."

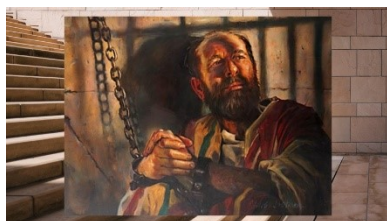
Prior to the advent of organized lifesaving, sailors involved in a wreck were likely to perish. Even if fortunate enough to make it to shore, the limited shelter offered by the dunes didn't significantly improve the sailor's chances of survival. Faced with the large number of shipwrecks and loss of life, the people of the surrounding communities began efforts to save the lives of shipwreck victims. They built lifesaving huts along the shores, gave swimming lessons to Boston public school students, produced instructional posters on resuscitation methods, and developed volunteer life savers that would row out to the ships to rescue shipwrecked sailors. They were incredibly brave and heroic men.

On March 31, 1879, a violent storm swept across Nantucket Sound, bringing powerful winds, freezing rain, snow, and heavy fog. By April 1, over sixty-eight vessels lay wrecked or disabled around the island. This led to the largest rescue effort in the island's history.

Captain Thomas F. Sandsbury and his crew of volunteer lifesavers rowed their surfboat toward the schooner John W. Hail. They rescued the crew and rowed them back to the safety of the shore. Then they went back out to the stormy sea and made their way to the schooner Emma J. Edwards. She was rolling from side to side. Her masts would thrash the sea with every turn, making it impossible to get near her. A sole survivor was visible. George Coffin tied a line around his waist to prevent himself from being swept away and jumped from the surfboat. George Coffin rescued the survivor.

For thirty-two consecutive hours Sandsbury and his crew endured the hardships of the storm and moving from wreck to wreck they rescued more than a dozen sailors. Other crews were doing the same. By the time the storm began to break, Nantucket's volunteers had rescued over forty sailors. The U.S. Congress recognized the courage of Sandsbury. Captain Sandsbury was given a gold medal and silver medals were awarded to each of his crew. There's a museum dedicated to all these brave men that served as lifesavers.

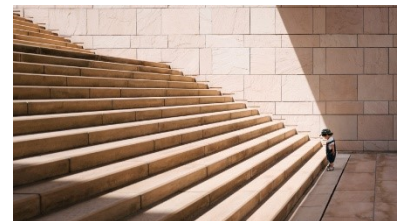
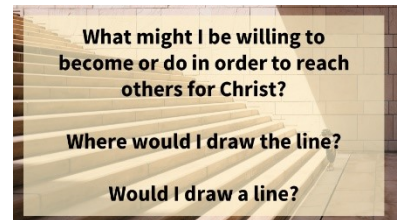
The motto of this group was: "You have to go out, but you don't have to come back." Though they were never paid, they never lacked for volunteers. They risked everything to save lives.



The apostle Paul was a man like that. He was willing to risk everything for the sake of the gospel. Paul was abused, stoned, imprisoned, and even shipwrecked – all for the sake of the gospel. Turn with me to 1st Corinthians 9, verses sixteen through 23 as we look at our second passage for today. As we begin, we learn in verse sixteen that Paul proclaims the gospel because *"an obligation"* has been laid upon him. Jesus himself named Paul the *"instrument"* that he chose to bring the good news to the world. Paul was entrusted with a commission – same Great Commission that Jesus gave to his immediate disciples and to all disciples who would follow in Matthew 28:19-20, where Jesus said, *"Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you"*.

Born as a Roman citizen, Paul was free with respect to all, but he chose to make himself a 'slave' to all, *"so that I might win more of them"* to the gospel. Paul chooses the word 'slave' intentionally. His willingness to be a slave to the gospel indicates how far he will go to share the good news of Jesus Christ. Slave is about as far from Roman citizen as you could get. In fact, slave is about as far as we could get from the lifestyle most of us live.

As we look at this text, we see that Paul was willing to do whatever it took - to save a Jew he became a Jew, to save one under the law he became one under the law, to save those outside the law he became one outside the law, to save the weak he became one who was weak. Last week we saw that Paul was willing to give up meat altogether if that is what it took to walk alongside those who were struggling with eating meat offered to idols. All of this leads me to ask myself, what might I be willing to become or do in order to reach others for Christ? Where would I draw the line? Would I draw a line? In turn, I ask, what might you be willing to become or do in order to reach others for Christ? Where would you draw the line? Would you draw a line? At what point do I become like this child, not sure if I can walk that path?



In the call to be willing, in the charge to use our God-given creativity, again, we do not need to be perfect. In our selfishness and in our uniqueness both, God will use us if we are but willing to be disciples of Jesus Christ. In verse 22 Paul states that he has *"become all things to all people, that I might by all means save some"*. Paul did not think that he would save everyone he met. He hoped that by being faithful, he might save some. That is the same charge for you and me. I am not going to save the whole world or even the community of Piedmont. I am not called to save all people. I am called to minister to, to try and help those I meet and interact with to come to know Jesus as their Lord and Savior. You are charged with the same task – to make a positive difference when and where you can, to be the epiphany, to be the light and love of Christ in the world.

In “Surprise the World” Frost calls Paul a “gifted evangelists”. Paul was one who had clarity in the gospel and had a unique alertness for opportunities to share his faith. Paul offered bold proclamations that testified to the power of Christ to change lives. Today, there are still gifted evangelists, people who powerfully communicate the power of the gospel. The vast majority of us, however, are what Frost calls “evangelic believers” – people of prayer, watchfulness, and what he calls ‘wise socializing’. That would be what Paul called the mature Christians in the church to practice concerning the eating of meat – to be wise socializers. Evangelic believers offer gracious answers to difficult questions and to hard circumstances and we find never-ending, creative ways to bring life and to sustain life.



In our text from Isaiah 40, the prophet speaks of our God who gives power to the faint and who strengthens the weak. As you consider your story of faith, when on your journey has God given you power to make a positive difference in your life or in someone else’s life? In your walk with Jesus, when have you found strength or been strength to someone else in their time of weakness? When has God allowed you to run when you thought you could barely walk? When has the Lord kept you going when you thought you could not take one more step? These are the stories of faith that we have to share with a world in need.

In our passage from 1st Corinthians 9 Paul was willing to be used in whatever way God wanted to use him to be the most effective in sharing the good news of Jesus Christ. Allowing God to be at his creative best empowers us to be our creative best at building the kingdom of God here on earth.

Our faith stories, our experiences on our journeys of faith – these are the fodder that we can use to help another see how Jesus can change their lives or to begin to understand how faith can make a positive difference in their life. Our stories and our experiences are the places of common ground and are the connection points that give power and life to those struggling, that can give strength and hope to those who are weak, that can carry someone through a trial or a challenge that they are facing in their life. Through us, God’s never-ending creativity will bring restoration to a broken world.

As we prepare to celebrate Holy Communion, I invite you to turn your attention to the screens for this short but powerful video.

GPS – Grow, Pray, Study

- 1) *Grow*. When has God used you creatively to bring healing, hope, life, restoration... to another? How can your story build our faith community?
- 2) *Pray*. Where is God working in you now, leading you to a next step in your faith or in your connections with others? Pray for guidance and courage!
- 3) *Study*. Read 1st Corinthians 9: 24-27. How is you running your race to “win” the imperishable prize tied to the charge to make disciples?

Restoration Video: (1:19)

Sometimes it's moments of brokenness which create the greatest transformations. Times where fear gives birth to faith, pain leads to healing and chaos dissolves into peace. It's in these times, we often see God more clearly. For in our deepest turmoil, He remains faithful. When our spirit is crushed, He remains strong. When the moment is too heavy, He carries the burden. As gold is refined by fire, we too, are often refined by struggle. It's part of growing, changing, becoming. Lately, the journey has been difficult. Our breath has been labored, our steps uneasy. But, we stand in faith knowing who is leading us through this desert. The God of Peace, the God of Hope, the God of Restoration.