

## *The Art of Worship*

*Genesis 1:1,26-27; I Chronicles 16:29*

Kirkland Congregational Church United Church of Christ

By Tod Gobledale

*From Genesis we read: In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth... God said, "let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness, and let them have stewardship over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the wild animals of the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps over the earth. So God created humankind in God's image, in the image of God God created them, male and female God created them.*

*And from First Chronicles we read: Ascribe to the LORD the glory due God's name, bring an offering and come before God. Worship the LORD in holy splendour.*

How do we experience God as creator, God as artist?

Ralph Waldo Emerson says, "The creation of beauty is art." The creation of beauty: consider the flowers of the fields... The creation of beauty: consider the dawn—sky tinted with reds, yellows, oranges, golds and greys, the glory of the rising sun... The creation of beauty: consider a baby—the delicacy of the hand, the fingers, the minute perfection of the fingernails, the smoothness of the skin, that new-born-baby aroma.

Emerson says, "The creation of beauty is art." God the creator, God the artist.

Genesis' author states: humankind, woman and man, we are created in God's image, gifted with hands and imaginations to be creators ourselves, people who render beauty, artists ourselves. Wow!

Some thoughts on art: the painter Paul Gauguin says, "I shut my eyes in order to see."

Michelangelo, when asked about the creation of one of his fabulous sculptures replied, "I saw the angel in the marble and I carved until I set it free."

Oscar Wilde remarks about beauty that tickles our ears, music, he says, "Music is art which is most near to tears and memory." Remember how a tune or song can transport you across time and space. Suddenly days, weeks, months, even years—if you are old enough—disappear, you are back dancing or singing, or sitting with someone you love... Music... "most near to tears and memory."

Modern science and the fine arts sometimes seem light years distant from each other. At my university the biology, chemistry and physics departments occupied a five story building in the heart, the heart of the campus. The fine arts studio resided in an old, dilapidated house the college had purchased on the farthest edges of the campus. Not much love lost there between science and the arts.

But one scientist muses: "The most beautiful thing we can experience is the mysterious..." the Mysterious, the Divine... He goes on to say, "The mysterious is the source of all true art and science," those are the words of Nobel Physics laureate, Albert Einstein.

The Phoenix Affirmations provide further reflections, "As Christians we strive to respond to God's artistry in creation by integrating the arts in worship, education, and proclamation. We encourage the reclaiming of artistry and artistic expression in all Christian endeavors, both personal and communal... We further affirm artistic expression as a way of reflecting God's creativity, joy and prophetic voice in what may be seen, heard, felt, tasted, sung and spoken."

Consider the art surrounding us today. We have pieces from Joan McBride's home, which is full of art. Joan has brought along these four painting and this sculpture called Icarus.

We also have these two pieces, no three pieces from Betti Evans home. Bill Evans, Betti's husband, painted this lakescape. Betti painted this water colour of the church's back garden in all of its spring glory. I said three pieces from Betti, what's the third piece? Betti's son, David, carved the frame that says, "In the shadow of His wings I will rejoice." Check it out.

From Terri Houlahan we have this mountain scape painted by Kathleen Houlahan. Terri says if you look closely, study it with care, you will find a face hidden. Have a look.

On the easels around us are prints of artwork from our church school curriculum. There are reproductions of those prints on the tables before you. Each of you, take one. Look at your art work. Here are questions for you to reflect upon as you look at your piece of art

- What do you see?
- How does it make you feel?
- What do you think the artist wanted to communicate?
- Where or how is God present in your picture, or not present?
- What single word or phrase would you use to describe your picture?
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Now, turn to the person next to you and share your responses to these questions.

*(Allow ten minutes for sharing about the artwork they are looking at)*

Created in God's image, each of us is a creator in our own right. Whether our medium is paint or plaster, instrument or voice, garden tools or kitchen utensils, prose or poetry, dance or sport, and the list goes on,... each of us is a creator, each one of us is a work of art and an artist.

April read from Chronicles as well as Genesis. In Chronicles it says: *Ascribe to the LORD the glory due God's name, bring an offering and come before God. Worship the LORD in holy splendour.*

"Worship the LORD in holy splendour." The implication to me is God loves beauty. "Bring an offering and come before God." Often we think of offering as simply the money we bring to church; but our offerings are more than money, much more than money. Our offerings are the creative acts we bring, not just to God in worship, as we do Sunday after Sunday in music and song-- thank you Ele and all our musicians and vocalists who share—but also in all the creative acts each of you do as you go about your lives. Those are offerings you bring to God, too.

Gauguin says "I close my eyes to see." Michelangelo says he saw the angel in the marble and carved until it was free." How easy the busy-ness of our lives permits us not to see, not to see God's creative hand at work in the world and universe around us. How easy to take for granted the artistic work of others. How easy to pooh-pooh and put down our own artistic endeavors. Friends, do not let it be so. Created in God's image we are made, male and female, endowed with the very essence of God's own creative powers and prowess, may we live out the artistic promise God has placed in each of us, this day and always.

Let us pray. God, thank you for your example in the beauty of the earth, in the beauty of the skies, in your love which from our birth over and around us lies, we are grateful. Thank you for sharing your creative powers with us and giving us the freedom to be the creators, the artists that we are meant to be. Assist us over the hurdles of our own doubts and fears, those voices in our heads that say, "we are not good enough." Help us to dance as though no one was watching, help us to raise our voices and sing, help us come before you with the offerings of ourselves as we express, express, who we are to you and those around us. May our art bring beauty, joy, justice and peace to the world and glory to you. Through Jesus Christ we pray. Amen.