

This message was prepared for the people of prayer of the Tontogany Presbyterian Church by Rev. Pamela Graf Short for the eighth Sunday after Pentecost, July fifteenth, in the year of our LORD two thousand and eighteen. It is based on the wide and generous gifts of the Holy Spirit, particularly as outlined in the passages below. On this particular Sunday, Dr. Marie Loudon-Hanes donated a painting to Tontogany. Her testimony is included at the end of this document.

Exodus 35:30 through 36:7

30 Then Moses said to the Israelites: See, the Lord has called by name Bezalel son of Uri son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah; **31** he has filled him with divine spirit, with skill, intelligence, and knowledge in every kind of craft, **32** to devise artistic designs, to work in gold, silver, and bronze, **33** in cutting stones for setting, and in carving wood, in every kind of craft. **34** And he has inspired him to teach, both him and Oholiab son of Ahisamach, of the tribe of Dan. **35** He has filled them with skill to do every kind of work done by an artisan or by a designer or by an embroiderer in blue, purple, and crimson yarns, and in fine linen, or by a weaver—by any sort of artisan or skilled designer.

1 Bezalel and Oholiab and every skillful one to whom the Lord has given skill and understanding to know how to do any work in the construction of the sanctuary shall work in accordance with all that the Lord has commanded. **2** Moses then called Bezalel and Oholiab and every skillful one to whom the Lord had given skill, everyone whose heart was stirred to come to do the work; **3** and they received from Moses all the freewill offerings that the Israelites had brought for doing the work on the sanctuary. They still kept bringing him freewill offerings every morning, **4** so that all the artisans who were doing every sort of task on the sanctuary came, each from the task being performed, **5** and said to Moses, "The people are bringing much more than enough for doing the work that the Lord has commanded us to do." **6** So Moses gave command, and word was proclaimed throughout the camp: "No man or woman is to make anything else as an offering for the sanctuary." So the people were restrained from bringing; **7** for what they had already brought was more than enough to do all the work.

Romans 12

1 I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.
2 Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God—what is good and acceptable and perfect.
3 For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of yourself more highly than you ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned.
4 For as in one body we have many members, and not all the members have the same function,
5 so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually we are members one of another.
6 We have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us: prophecy, in proportion to faith;
7 ministry, in ministering; the teacher, in teaching;
8 the exhorter, in exhortation; the giver, in generosity; the leader, in diligence; the compassionate, in cheerfulness.
9 Let love be genuine; hate what is evil, hold fast to what is good;
10 love one another with mutual affection; outdo one another in showing honor.
11 Do not lag in zeal, be ardent in spirit, serve the Lord.
12 Rejoice in hope, be patient in suffering, persevere in prayer.
13 Contribute to the needs of the saints; extend hospitality to strangers.
14 Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them.
15 Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep.
16 Live in harmony with one another;
do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly; do not claim to be wiser than you are.
17 Do not repay anyone evil for evil, but take thought for what is noble in the sight of all.
18 If it is possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all.

19 Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave room for the wrath of God; for it is written, "Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord."

20 No, "if your enemies are hungry, feed them;

if they are thirsty, give them something to drink; for by doing this you will heap burning coals on their heads."

21 Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

In our Bible stories for today
gifts of the Spirit are linked with love;
and artistry—with generosity.
The mind, the heart, the hands,
the spirit of the community of faith
are touched by the Holy Spirit.
Grace and goodness,
honor and hope rise up with colorful praise to God:
The One who pairs beauty with hospitality
and design with worship.

Worship is present in both the Exodus story
and Paul's letter to the church in Rome.

In the Letter:

"Present your bodies as a living sacrifice,
holy and acceptable to God,
which is your spiritual worship";
and in Exodus

"whoever is of generous heart bring the LORD's offering" (Exodus 35:5).

The offerings were to be used to prepare the physical space for worship,
the Tabernacle, a tent that moved from place to place. A way of saying perhaps,
that where you go, so goes worship;
wherever you are,
bow in humility to God's holy mercies and
give thanks for God's creative expressions of grace.

"And they came.

*Everyone whose heart was stirred
and everyone whose spirit was willing"*
(Exodus 35:21a).

Before they ever built the tabernacle,
before they ever spun the threads,
before they ever carved the lampstands,
before they ever cut a stone,
the Holy Spirit stirred about
and the human spirit responded in kind
and though they did not yet have a physical sanctuary in which to bow,
their spirits were willing
and their bodies became living sacrifices
gathering and giving and tanning and dying
and shaping and molding and stitching and setting
for "[God] filled them with skill
*to do every kind of work done
by an artisan*

*or by a designer
or by an embroiderer
in blue, purple and crimson yarn” (Exodus 35:35a).*

You know what this is like—
to be stirred, to be willing.
You work in wood and metal;
in clay and canvas and cloth;
in dance and in drama;
with scraps of paper and shards of glass;
through a lens and with a soldering iron;
you plant a perennial bed
and play a pattern of notes;
you arrange gladiolas
and place dots and swirls and script on the top of cakes.
Whether you count yourself as an artist or not,
you contribute to the ministry of the Holy Spirit through your encouragement,
your monetary gifts,
your expressions of appreciation
and your prayers.
Both in today’s Bible story
and in Tontogany’s story
artistry leads to generosity
and generosity allows for space and time and materials needed for the gifts of the Holy Spirit to spring up and refresh us all.

*“Everyone whose heart was stirred
and everyone whose spirit was willing”.*

The Letter to the Romans struck me in a new way.
In the past,
I have seen this chapter as a sort of hodge-podge of instructions;
but what if it is not random splotches,
but a tapestry of strength?
Not boxes to be checked,
but colors that begin with seeds of worship
and end with a garden of peace?

*“Everyone whose heart was stirred
and everyone whose spirit was willing”.*

What if the gifts that the Holy Spirit has planted in Tontogany thrive together in such fashion that the enemy
—those mean and cussed,
belligerent and ornery,
arrogant and self-absorbed—
what if they find nourishment here?
Nourishment that is so artistically arranged that affection and honor,
cheerfulness and grace
transform them in noble visions and hopeful joy?
What if we love them even before they’re transformed?
What if we love ourselves before we’re transformed?
What will happen if we bless and feed and attend to the thirst in their souls and in ours?

“Everyone whose heart was stirred and everyone whose spirit was willing”.

Paul uses the word “body” in two ways:

First he refers to individual physical bodies presented to God for service, for worship.
And then he refers to the collective body of Christ Jesus.

Just because someone has a physical body that has been created and gifted for artistry,
it does not mean that their spirit is willing.

And even when willing,
every artist grows weary, has dry spells, needs to rest.

In the same way,
just because we,
the collective body of Christ here in Tontogany,
have been created and gifted
for compassion and affection,
for honoring and hospitality,
it does not mean we are willing.

Just as the artist must keep up her craft in order to offer something to God that is good and acceptable and perfect,

so too we must regularly be practicing
generosity and diligence,
love and perseverance,
harmony and peacemaking.

Yes, we will grow weary and have dry spells and need to rest.

But we need not rely on our own strength,
but rather all our artistry,
all our offerings,
all our zeal,
all our harmony,
all our loving

comes from and goes through and is received by
the tender mercies of our God;

The tender mercies of the Holy Spirit;

The One who is

quietly

joyfully

faithfully

hopefully

moving a stir stick

and imagining you good and acceptable and perfect.

*“And they came. Everyone whose heart was stirred and everyone whose spirit was willing”
(Exodus 35:21a).*

Now may the Creative Power of the Holy Spirit
Fill your body with artful joy
Your spirit with glad mercies
And your soul with generosity, honor, harmony and peace
Now and forevermore. Amen.

The Testimony of Dr. Marie Louden-Hanes

This painting is a gift; it is given to you with thanksgiving for this congregation and for your ministry...

It is a simple painting: two colors on a broad sheet of white paper.

Its open and unidentified space invites personal reflection and interpretation.

When we hung the painting in the sanctuary last November, the words of a familiar hymn came to mind: "I come to the garden alone, while the dew is still on the roses; And the voice I hear, falling on my ear, the Son of God discloses. He speaks, and the sound of His voice is so sweet, the birds hush their singing, and the melody that He gave to me, Within my heart is ringing."

The beautiful refrain is familiar to all of us:

"And He walks with me, and He talks with me, And He tells me I am His own, And, the joy we share as we tarry there, None other has ever known."

During that cold and grey November morning, several saw in the painting the first blush of an early spring morning, others found serenity in the undefined shapes and soft colors. Others noted and appreciated the open space of the composition.

The painting seemed at home here.

It had been exhibited in a local tea house and in a gallery on campus and, for a few months, it was part of the inventory of a small gift shop where it was just another painting among many waiting to be sold.

But, here, in the church, it seemed to have new life; here in the church it becomes liturgical art.

Here, the painting seemed to tell a different story; it was as if the painting had been created for this space; but the artist had never been here before and knew nothing of the natural light that fills the sanctuary.

Creative expression belongs to all of us; it is part of our personal and collective identity. It comes to us without our inquiry or knowledge or conscious decision.

Our creativity is a gift from God.

To say you are not creative is to deny God's gift to you.

Creativity is a constant presence within each of us. It lies deep within our psyche waiting for the moment when it hears "how about this, will this work?" It is the same for the visual artist in the studio making decisions about composition and color and calling creativity into action.

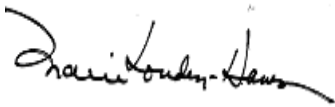
Children eagerly embrace creativity. They are not tentative; and, with unfettered expression and gay abandon, they gleefully tap into nature's colors and shadows and forms. We delight in the imaginative ways children use the gift of creativity. They provide incentive for all of us to indulge liberally in the creative process.

Creativity is God's gift to us; it surrounds us, becomes us, gives us identity and clarity, encourages us and challenges us to go beyond, to explore, to expand what we know and to confirm what we believe. We gather ourselves into families and groups and congregations where we recognize the spirit of creativity alive and well. All of us here from the youngest worshipper to the most senior among us will contribute to the narrative of this simple painting of only two colors.

Might we find in the painting an invitation to walk in the garden with Christ, to share our stories with Christ and to enjoy the refreshment of each new day as cleansed and renewed children of God.

Yes, the painting is at home here. This is where it belongs.

Thank you for accepting it.



Marie Louden-Hanes.