



KNU International English Church

A LOVING COMMUNITY THAT CHANGES OUR WORLD.

October 2, 2011

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Worship and Art

Worship Series - Week 5

Part 1: “Art-Full Worship” (Exodus 31:1-11 and John 6:47-58)

[1] “In the beginning, God created...” “In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth” (Genesis 1:1). And what a wonderful, resplendent, beautiful world God created.

- [2] From fish to flowers ...
- [3] From atoms to Alps ...
- [4] From galaxies to germs ...

Our God has created an infinitely complex world. From its smallest to largest dimensions, the beauty and complexity of our world staggers our minds and enraptures our hearts. Our God creates. Our God creates flowers that no one will ever see and stars that no one will ever reach. Our God creates bacteria and electrons and magnetic waves and thermonuclear reactions and sea currents and black holes and nebula and more species of animals than we have even discovered. Our God creates. Beauty and complexity, simplicity and profundity, majesty and glory ooze from God’s very Being. God is Creator, and creation bears God’s glory.

[5] From the beginning of time, people have worshiped God through creation. Adam and Eve joined the creative process by naming the animals, caring for the garden, and creating more human beings. Noah joined the Creator’s mission by creating an ark as an instrument of salvation and then building an altar as a sign of worship. Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob all worshiped God by building altars to hold their sacrifices.

Creation and beauty have always been part of worship of the Creator. Worship has always been art-full (full of art). As people made like the Creator, we cannot help but to create when we express our worship of the Creator. Our creation - our mutual display of beauty - draws us closer to the heart of the Creator.

[6] Consider, for example, the detailed instructions God gave to Moses for the building of the tabernacle. We read a summary earlier in Exodus 31. Actually, Exodus includes six full chapters of very careful instructions about making an exceedingly beautiful mobile temple for worshipping God. There were to be beautifully crafted instruments of gold and bronze, and walls made of beautifully woven tapestries, and rich smelling incense, and the savory smell of roasting meats and breads. Worshipping God in the tabernacle was an assault on the senses by the Creator of the senses. Worship in the tabernacle called our total being into worship of the Creator of being. The Creator of beauty commanded a beautiful house of worship.

And notice also that Bezalel is the first person the Bible says is filled with the Spirit of God. Not Noah, not Abraham, not Moses, but Bezalel, the artist. The artist is filled with the Spirit of God to craft the worship space so that God's people can sense the Spirit of God when they gather to worship. The Creator of beauty empowers his people to create with beauty so that we can beautifully worship our beautiful God.

[7] But art extends beyond the visual and spatial. After Israel passed through the Red Sea to escape from Egypt, the first thing they did was to sing. First Moses led them in a song of triumph, and then Miriam led the women with tambourines and dancing and song to praise God (Exodus 15). King David is famous for his prayer songs to God, and we have 150 of Israel's worship songs saved for us in the book of Psalms. In fact, around the world, in every religion, people turn to music to express our hearts beyond words. We need music and rhythm and dance to worship our Creator from depths of our souls that words alone cannot touch.

[8] But even our words are not limited to mere words. Worshipers have eternally resisted the boring, straightforward use of words in mere linear progression. Priests and prophets and song writers became word-crafters, poets, and narrative artists. Words have a power of art that goes beyond their literal meaning. "The Lord is my rock" (Psalm 18:2). "Those who trust in the Lord ... will fly on wings like eagles" (Isaiah 40:31). "I will not stop praying for her until her righteousness shines like the dawn" (Isaiah 62:1). "I want to see a mighty flood of justice, an endless river of righteous living" (Amos 5:24).

Even Jesus was a word-crafter. He was a poet, bringing us the Beatitudes (Matthew 5:1-12) in such beauty that even irreligious people study and memorize them. He was perhaps the greatest story teller of all time, tweaking our understanding, and catching us by surprise with his unusual parables. He also used striking metaphors to shock his listeners into facing difficult truths. One of the most difficult metaphors of the Bible comes in John 6.

[9] "But anyone who eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise that person at the last day. For my flesh is true food, and my blood is true drink. Anyone who eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me, and I in him" (John 6:54-56).

No wonder people walked away. If we only hear Jesus' literal words, he is asking us to be cannibals. It is as if Jesus offers to cut off a piece of his arm as ambrosia or drains his blood into a cup as an elixir of life. Why does Jesus speak with these incredibly difficult words?

The stark difficulty of his words forces us to move beyond our comfort zones to consider the deeper meaning. Moses offered bread and laws from God. Jesus offers his very self. If we want Life, if we want God, somehow we have to take Jesus into our deepest being. We have to digest not only his teaching but his very self, so that our life pumps with his life, our thoughts flow with his thoughts, our heart beats with his heart.

[10] This is the direction of all art in worship. Art-full worship opens us to God's Spirit so that God's Spirit can merge with our spirits. In art-full worship, we see the "God of

glory, Lord of love,” and our “hearts unfold like flowers before thee, opening to the sun above.”¹

In every worship service, through beautiful music, beautiful words, beautiful flowers, beautiful colors, and beautiful art, we invite you to worship our beautiful God. Beauty unfolds our hearts before God. Creativity helps us connect with the Creator.

One way we do this is through the Christian seasons and the colors that represent the seasons. The seasons of the Christian year are like the rhythm of the Christian life-song. Moving through the seasons rehearses the great themes of the Christian story and retrains our steps to God’s great rhythms.

[11] For Christians in worship, the church year doesn’t begin with January 1 or 설날 (Lunar New Year). The year begins with the season of Advent - or Coming - in which we wait for the coming of Christ. This is a double waiting. We wait with the people of the Old Testament for the coming of the Messiah at the first Christmas, and we wait now with people around the world for the second return of Jesus. The color symbolizing this waiting is purple - like the night sky before sunrise, and like the color of royalty in ancient times.

[12] Then, we move to the season of Christmas and Epiphany, celebrating the coming of the Messiah, the Christ, the Light of the World. Jesus has come, and he shines in amazing glory, so the colors of Christmas are white and gold.

[13] Next, after a brief stop in “Common Time,” we move to the season of Lent. This is not a “Catholic” tradition. The Church has been practicing Ash Wednesday and the season of Lent for more than 1500 years. The primary point of Lent is spiritual spring cleaning. For six weeks, we look deep into our souls and ask God to remove anything that shouldn’t be there. As we read the gospel stories of Jesus moving closer to the cross, we also die to our sinful natures. As a season of repentance, the color is often gray or black.

[14] After the repentance and death of Lent, we celebrate new life through Jesus resurrection at Easter. This is the most important day of the year. Jesus life, death, and resurrection changes everything. To celebrate his new life, we return to the colors of triumph - white and gold.

[15] Next, we move into a season reflecting on the life of the church. For seven weeks until Pentecost, we think about what it means to be Jesus’ people here on this earth. What does it mean to be a people filled with the Spirit of the Messiah? Because God’s Spirit came with fire on Pentecost, fire-red is the color for this season.

[16] Finally, we enter a long six month journey through Common Time. Half of the church year is devoted to simple, ordinary life. The color for Common Time is green, the color of grass and trees, and the sign of growth. Our ordinary, common life is a life of simple growth in the grace of God.

[17] Today, we want to invite you to worship our Creator by engaging the process of creation. Around the room today we have assembled prayer stations which invite you to actively participate in worship today. If you have been to one of our 24-7 Prayer rooms, these will be familiar to you. If not, this can give you a taste of what it’s like to pray in

¹ Henry Van Dyke, “Joyful, Joyful, We Adore Thee,” 1907.

different ways. We're going to spend most of our service today giving you the chance to practice worshipping the Creator through participating in creation.

Each station has a sign with some directions on how to pray in that place. Move around from station to station and pray however your spirit moves you. Use art, words, body language, symbolic action, or silence to worship God. You are also free to stay in your seat and watch the screen for directions on how to pray. There's no hurry. We'll be doing this for the next 40 minutes or so. Take your time and connect with God.

Go to prayer stations.

Part 2: "Art-Full Life"

[18] Ephesians 2:4-10

⁴ But God is so rich in mercy, and he loved us so much, ⁵ that even though we were dead because of our sins, he gave us life when he raised Christ from the dead. (It is only by God's grace that you have been saved!) ⁶ For he raised us from the dead along with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms because we are united with Christ Jesus. ⁷ So God can point to us in all future ages as examples of the incredible wealth of his grace and kindness toward us, as shown in all he has done for us who are united with Christ Jesus.

[19] *⁸ God saved you by his grace when you believed. And you can't take credit for this; it is a gift from God. ⁹ Salvation is not a reward for the good things we have done, so none of us can boast about it. ¹⁰ For we are God's masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so we can do the good things he planned for us long ago.*

[20] This is worship. God is so rich in mercy and he has loved us so much that he has moved us from death to life. God has transformed us by his grace. We were dead and helpless, but he reached into our lives through Christ and breathed new life into our spirits and sets us free. God's beauty forgives our sins. God's beauty transforms our ugliness. God's beauty heals our brokenness. God's beauty reclaims our beauty.

For we are God's masterpiece. In all of this beautiful world, from galactic distances to subatomic mysteries, we are God's greatest masterpiece. Humans and humanity are God's greatest works of art. He has created us and created us anew in Christ Jesus to join him in creation. As God's great works of art, we join the master Artist in the work of making art. We join the Author of beauty in beautifying our world.

"With eyes wide open to the mercies of God, I beg you, my brothers, as an act of intelligent worship, to give him your bodies, as a living sacrifice, consecrated to him and acceptable by him. Don't let the world around you squeeze you into its own mould, but

let God re-mould your minds from within, so that you may prove in practice that the plan of God for you is good” (Romans 12:1-2, Phillips Translation).

The truest act of worship is a life of worship. The truest form of art is a beautiful life. Live artfully. Live a beautiful life that shows the beauty of the Creator of beauty.

This week, I discovered a mystic artist named Alex Gray. He believes that the healing of the world is found in the space of art, connecting spirit and matter. Listen to his part explanation of the plan for global redemption. (It’s really long so, I can only quote some of the poem.)

1. *God Creates the Cosmos with Love.*
2. *When we create with Love we align ourselves with the God Force.*
3. *The Cosmos and our world is God’s evolving creation, an unfinished masterpiece we each co-create.*
4. *Love will go to any length to fulfill its creation.*
5. *We are each a finite mirror of God’s infinite creation. ...*
8. *Our challenge as co-creators is to mirror God’s love and beauty in all our creations.*
9. *All action is creation more or less conscious. ...*
24. *Meet God in the storm of life and be a conductor of Divine Radiance.*
25. *The Example of your light can set of a chain reaction of Pentecostal soulfire.*
26. *Soulfire is the passion to perform acts, to create in accordance with divine law...*
32. *The plasma state of soulfire in the heart is the welding torch of Love fusing God and human together.*
33. *A well-lit soulfire can burn away obstacles to the Divine for thousands of years.*
34. *Sacred space mirrors the heart as a pumphouse for communal soulfire...²*

The point of worship is to be a sacred pumphouse for our hearts to burn together in communal soulfire so that Love can fuse God and human together. The point of worship is to so catch our hearts on fire with God’s love that we join the creative process of living with love and beauty until all creation mirrors God’s love and beauty.

Be the masterpiece that you are. Live God’s love and change the world.

² Alex Gray, “The Plan,” *Art Psalms*, 2008.