

# The Creative Spirit

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## TO BE AN ARTIST

When I create, I leave myself die for a moment,  
I fling myself like a bird leaving  
a quiet branch and heading into a long  
flight south,  
northern winds snapping at her tail.

When I create I let myself go,  
move beyond the borders  
of who I am and into  
an unknown self, where  
I risk losing the safety and structure of my consciousness

When I create I live in the body  
of the earth,  
I know the pen, the instrument, the painters brush to be  
of my body  
and I long to tell you, you who are Earth too,  
to listen as we speak for  
we are the Creator.

My neighbor, Alison, insisted I join her on a Saturday night a few weeks ago with a few other women on our street. We went to a local bar to hear a band whose lead singer is also from our block. Alison was creating a neighborhood.

Yesterday one of our members called me to talk about helping another member with some difficult tasks ahead of her. Together we talked about who else in this congregation could help us, who knows this women, who might be willing or able to lend a hand to one of our own in a time of need. This member was creating meaningful community.

On Wednesday, a group of young adult UUs are going to Houston to protest the sale of mineral rights by our federal government to oil companies. They are attending hearings and rallies and speaking to the press and launching a social media campaign, doing all they can to keep fossil fuels in the ground. Those UUs are creating a healthier future for the next generation.

This morning, some of us made coffee for a partner or breakfast for a child. We called a loved one living away from home or walked a dog who lives right under foot. We were creating family.

This week, thousands of people are arriving in Washington, DC to protest the influence of money in politics, ultimately holding a massive demonstration next Saturday. They are calling on our political leaders to support bills before them that level the playing field, creating equal access for all Americans. Those thousands of people are creating our own Democracy Spring.

*What does it mean to be a people of Creation?* That's our question for April. We are a people of Creation, a people who were created and who, in turn, live a life of creativity. We are co-creators of this universe, making it precisely what it is and will be. What have you created recently?

The role of creator is ours. We are, all of us, artists, designers, great imaginers of the future. We don't always know that. It's not a reality we live into, necessarily, or not one we're conscious of. We think we're just doing what's next, trying to get by, grateful if we got out of bed and had clean clothes to wear and running water to wash our faces. So many of us have forgotten that we are The Creators. I suspect we've even forgotten we know how to create, how to design the world we dream about.

My son is in kindergarten. Every morning before we leave for school, I check his backpack for the essentials. A sweater, a snack packed neatly in his Star Wars lunch box, an empty water bottle to be filled up at school, some toy cars in case he gets bored on the bus ride home *and* one blue, plastic folder, standard issue for every kindergartener. It gets put into the back pack empty each morning and in the afternoon, it returns filled with papers. Sometimes there are flash cards with new sight words or a note from the school about an upcoming assembly. But every day, without exception, there's paper colored with crayons or glitter or something else to give it flare. Which means, in class, every day, without exception, each 6 year old has a reason to draw something, to paint something, to cut shapes from colored paper and paste it onto something. And every day that blue folder is filled with treasurers of the day's lessons and adventures. Pictures of butterflies emerging from a cocoon, of the Earth rotating around the sun, or maybe of horses *flying* in a jungle made of *lollipops*.

If you ask my son what he can draw, he'll say, "Anything. What do you want? Want to see me riding my bicycle over an ocean? Or Grandma learning ninja moves from her cats? Or how about daddy playing soccer against a team of tigers in space?" He can do it all. And, at 6 years old, he's encouraged to do it. It's part of the day's curriculum. They learn math and reading and science and they play outdoors and they color and paint and glue things. Hanging in every cubby is a smock ready on a moment's notice.

In Kindergarten, everything you need is one room. There's paint and music and room to dance, there are science experiments and lab equipment and materials to read and write and sing and build. Those things are available in middle school and high school and college, but they are in different rooms, maybe different buildings and as we get older, we limit who has access to them. The older we get, the more specialized and focused. If you ask my son's class who knows how to draw, every one of them would raise their hands. Who can use clay, who can paint, who can sing or dance or who can play an instrument or play pretend- not a hand would stay down. "Of course we can," they'd say, "We can do all those things."

As we get older, we separate things out. This room is for painting and that room is for singing and science experiments are done over there. And, with each passing year, we discern, generally for ourselves but sometimes for each other, who belongs in which room. Are you a singer? Can you dance? Can you act? Can you draw? That's your room. Or, maybe you need to find another building.

I'm not going to ask you to raise your hand, but I'd like us to consider when we stopped thinking we could do it all. When did we stop trusting our own creative spirits? We certainly have in this room some accomplished artists, people with great talent. But, I'm going to bet that there are things even they'd say they can't do.

So, I ask you: *When did you stop singing? When did you stop dancing? When did you stop thinking you could draw a picture of yourself riding a bicycle across an ocean?*

Art is part of the design of our survival. Without it, we perish and yet, sometime between kindergarten and college, we learned that we can't do it. We're taught to be embarrassed, to think *talent* is a necessary part of engaging the creative process. Sometime between the ages of 6 and 21, we learn – which means we also teach – that we *can't* do more things than we *can* do, that we *shouldn't* do all kinds of things we've *always* done. And the older we get, the fewer things we allow ourselves to do. A teenager is more likely to learn how to play a new instrument than an adult; a person in college is more likely to try out for a local play or start dancing on the street than a person in her 40s. We learn – and we teach each other – to suppress the creative spirit, to limit it to private places or those things for which we demonstrate great talent.

But, the human soul needs to write poetry. We need to make music. We need to dance and sing and act and design. We need to let our imaginations run wild.

Daydreaming is part of the creative process. I spend a lot of time daydreaming. I imagine beautiful, old houses and I decorate them in my mind. Ceilings, walls, windows, floors, furniture. I imagine textures and colors and scents in each room. The other direction my day dreams take is imagining the perfect community. It's always attached to a farm where animals are safe, a place people can work and be cared for, a place everyone is getting what they need. I create this beloved community in my mind over and over again. Daydreaming is a critical part of the creative process and a key to how we survive a world that can be cold and lonely and frightening. It's how

we know where we want to go and how we're going to get there. It's the door into whatever's next.

Last week I called a man I know. This man is at the top of his game, well known and respected in his field. He's met with the pope and the Dali Lama and recently turned down an invitation to the White House because he had something more important to do. When I called his cell phone, he answered but sounded a little dazed. He then confessed he'd been daydreaming. I laughed and apologized for interrupting the most important thing he'd do all day. He didn't get it and responded by saying, "I hope not" but I actually meant it. I think that for this man to do all he does, to imagine the world a better place, to build the world we all dream about, he's going to need to do a whole lot of day dreaming. He got thousands of people to St. Peter's Square at the Vatican for a massive demonstration of support for the Pope's Encyclical on the Earth. You might have seen it on CNN or read about it in the Times. The only way for that to happen is to be willing to dream big, to let your imagination run free.

Daydreaming isn't a waste of time; it's the mandatory preliminary action without which nothing else can be done. First, we dream. First we imagine Beloved Community. First we let ourselves believe that what we wish, can be.

It's a skill we're born with. I have a friend whose 4 year old son went from pretending he and his mom were Anna and Else, to pretending they were a pirate and his sister, to his friends daniel and jean, to a lizard and his mother, in the span of about 45 minutes. Later that day he was Captain America and he and his friends Buzz Light Year and the Hulk saved Philadelphia from Dark Vader. (Yes, he calls him Dark Vader.)

Trusting, indulging imagination is our only option if we want transformation, if we want a new world. (How will that little boy stop Dark Vader if he doesn't play pretend first?) But, I suspect part of being taught that we aren't artists is learning that imagination is for children or ne'er-do-wells. That might be why my colleague was embarrassed that I caught him daydreaming. That's not what powerful, successful men do.

To live without imagination, without regular visits to a fantasy world is to live in a world defined only by what we see, by what we can define and defend; it is to live on a flat plane. Depth is the result of our willingness to investigate our desire, to engage sacred imagination, to devote ourselves to ingenuity, to listen to intuition, the voice of the soul.

Creativity is natural, we are born to it. We get coaxed away from our artistic instincts, but they are as natural and as necessary as breathing. We are the artists of our lives. We are already creating meaning in what could be an empty or purposeless existence; we are creating the dance of balancing work and family, and creating hope by showing up here and letting ourselves be counted as one who believes in a new world.

So, what does it mean to be a people of Creation? It means we indulge our imaginations. It means we let go of both internal and external critics, affirming our birthright as artists, as co-creators of this universe. It means we sing at the top of our voices and audition for that local play or get our friends to our living rooms and act out a favorite play just for ourselves. It means we reach out to help each other, or fight for economic or racial or environmental justice. It means we bring home folders filled with papers we've colored and pasted and poured glitter all over and it means we dance in the streets when the music moves us and sing at the top of our lungs and day dream all day long.