

I have a friend who is an artist. They make clothes. My friend’s realization that he was an artist started with an experience he had in his journalism class in high school. It happened on a very specific day, a very specific moment, he says, as he was walking across the classroom during one of the many periods before and after school in which his class spent time pulling together the school newspaper.

As he was walking across the class, he glanced at the desk of another student. This student was working on some graphics for a story. He was caught, my friend says, stopped in his tracks, by a number of drawings, spread out amongst all the papers that surrounded the student as they worked. These drawings were obviously very early ideas for pieces that the student was working on, but they weren’t rough sketches or “concept pieces” drawn with skill and care for later development that my friend said he would have expected to see, but rather they were really rudimentary, out of proportion pieces that just looked – well....just kind of terrible.

Now what my friend would later explain as he reflected on this experience was that he was caught not so much by the quality of the drawings in and of themselves, but rather that the artist was happily working away amongst all their peers and teachers and just did not seem to care, not even a little bit, that there, for all to see, were these pieces that were way, way, way less than perfect. My friend reports being drawn in by this and went on to spend some time watching and getting to know this other student and how they worked.

He saw them go through a process of producing the first ideas that came into their head with the skills they had and then he saw them examine what they had produced, consult with others, ask for feedback, look at online resources, and then practice and shape and practice some more, working on what they were creating until they got to something that was really impactful and just what was needed to support the story their graphic was accompanying.

My friend got to know someone captivated by the power of art to tell a story and someone willing to do what it took to understand and practice and learn more about how to do this thing that interested them, that called to them. Someone who didn’t care a bit about being vulnerable in front of others because they were

more interested in creating something that worked for the community and that also fulfilled their passion and desire to learn more about how to make art.

In the end this person's vulnerability and dedication produced not only impactful and beautiful pieces but it also contributed to a community that trusted each other and could engage and create together in thoughtful and life-giving ways.

Something about this experience caused my friend to question most of what he had learned in his short 17 years about what it is to be an artist, what it is to create, what it is to learn and build something in and for the world. He realized that he had grown to trust what he now saw as a lie that said if you are going to let yourself be seen, if you are going to offer something to the world, if you are going to put yourself out there, if you are going to create something - anything, it better be good, it better fit with what the world says is of value.

He had learned that we will be judged on what we produce even while we are in the process of learning and there are standards and to let the world see something less than perfect is a weakness, a failure and he, especially as a white man, just couldn't be seen to show weakness or to fail. He started to see, as he worked through these new learnings, just how hard the systems of the world were working to convince him that he needed to show up in a perfect way, fully adept, proficient and with all the right answers.

This encounter changed everything for my friend. It took him a little while because, as I say, the powers and pressures of our world that tells us we have to get things right first time are strong, but eventually he began to trust his own interest in art, and he began to pursue learning with and from the art he produced no matter it's quality and he worked with his art in the company of others who were interested in these same things. He worked hard to silence those voices in himself that were critical and told him he had no business trying unless he had some obvious, magical, natural gift for art. He filled pages and pages with all sorts of different drawings and pieces of art at all levels of proficiency.

My friend now claims very strongly, now stakes his whole self, in fact, on the claim, that all of us are born as creative people – all of us have curiosities and questions, loves and interests, and all have a call to practice and to pursue those things that interest us, naming and learning from our own mistakes, and humbly turning to

those who know more than us, or just know differently from us, to learn and to help us find the way to fullness for ourselves and for the whole community.

This type of creativity. This type of art-making - whether it shows up in the desire to make clothes, or a meal, or friendships or music or whatever; this type of creativity that is about producing something for others and with others; that is rooted in letting ourselves to be seen in the process; that depends of us learning from our mistakes, that others invite and grounds itself in care for each other - this type of creativity produces strong community and it is where life is found.

Peter affirms and blesses the life that is found in this type of community. Tabitha had resources. She didn't need to make herself known in her creativity. But she did. The community knows her through her work with and for them. This community raises the alarm when something happens to her. They loved her and they cared for her because she did for them. That type of love and need doesn't come from transactional relationships where we don't get to know and care for each other. It comes from transformational relationships where we have let each other in and have learned and loved together.

We, the church, are invited into this type of community. A place where we make beautiful things together. Music and gardens, meals and friendships. A place where we make our mistakes, and we learn, and we grow in love and care for each other – not just each other here but out there too. We can only do this if we see all people as bearing gifts - creative and sacred. And if we let all those gifts come to the table.

The creative spirit of God is in us – all of us. It's a spirit that asks us what do you feel called to make. Music, friendships, healing spaces, food, art, houses, gardens, poetry, clothes, dance. The creative spirit of God is in all of us asking us to remember that we are safe, and we will find life as we let our curiosity and our desire to make beautiful things show. There is a loving God who holds us and asks us to remember that as we make and look at the mistakes we make by ourselves and with others, we trust we grow in wisdom and possibility.

When we show up beloved trusting the creativity and the desire for well-being that is in us and resides in others too, we will find others ready to go with us on this

creative journey we have been called to. And we will find ourselves raised to life and moving into a more life-giving future.

Thanks be to God

Amen