

## Unleash your creativity

July 23, 2023. Rev. Dr. David Thompson

Text: The man got up and walked out in front of everyone, so that they were all astounded and praised God saying “We have never seen anything like this!”

Experts tell us that our creativity tends to get beaten out of us very early on in life. Sir Ken Robinson, British author, says that children are very creative and see no limits.

One young man managed to get to MIT without the creativity being beaten out of him. He decided to write a thesis on **conditioned responses**.

As an MIT student he spent the entire summer going to the Harvard football field every day wearing a black and white striped shirt, walking up and down the field for about ten minutes or so throwing bird seed all over the field, blowing a whistle and then walking off the field.

At the end of the summer it came time for the first Harvard home football game. The referee walked onto the field and blew the whistle and the game had to be delayed for half an hour to get the birds

off the field!

In the Gospel we read about Jesus returning to the house of Peter and Andrew. There was standing room only. A paralytic, who had heard of Jesus and his miraculous powers, wanted to see if Jesus could heal him. Fortunately for him he had four wonderful friends! They however had a problem. There was the crowd. There was no access. The paralytic needed individual attention. What were they to do?

If the four friends had operated with conditioned responses they probably would have acted like the birds at Harvard and:

- Lined up outside
- Complained a lot while they waited
- Tried to push their way through and would probably have been stopped by other people. Can't you hear the dialogue? “ Look I got here first. There are a lot of sick people here waiting to see him; just who do you think you are?”
- Then the friends would have gone home again and given up on the idea without the problem being solved

But that is not what happened. Instead they unleashed their creativity! They stepped outside the usual parameters. They didn't use the door like everyone else. They used the ceiling as a door. Now that was creativity!

These four had to be prepared to replace the roof. They had a lot of determination and courage because they really risked criticism for the home invasion!

So how does Jesus, respond?

First let's note what Jesus does not do.

He does not say "Now fellows, please get to the back of the line. Whatever would happen if everyone did this sort of thing? Why wherever I went the roof would be in jeopardy. I know you have a problem but you will have to wait like everyone else! Fair is fair!"

Sound familiar?

What in fact does Christ do?

Jesus rewards them! He saw their courage, the desperation that drove the paralytic and his amazingly creative friends, **and all this came together in their faith**, which Jesus always rewarded.

The Scripture says; "Seeing their faith Jesus said to the paralytic:

"My child, your sins are forgiven. Get up and pick up your stretcher and go off home!" And the man did so!!

But the scribes and Pharisees who were conservative conformists were not amused! In fact, they were furious!!

Eugene Raudsepp, an author on creativity. and creative games, argues that creativity and conformity are linked. People who conform, generally don't get along well with creative people and vice versa.

Raudsepp classifies people who conform into categories.

1) There are the **other-directed conformers** who have opinions based on the group to which they belong. They are not self directed.

2)**Selective conformers** have individualistic outlooks but generally go along with the group just to avoid trouble. This is the sort of person who does not write a letter to the editor just in case it might hurt their business.

3)The **negativistic conformer** is the sort of person who rejects the opinions of others simply because they enjoy being contrarian. This is the sort of person who always votes against the decisions of the majority in a meeting. They always see which direction the wind is blowing before they vote. They take their clues from the majority and then do the opposite. What they don't realize is that they are still conformists, it is just that the conformity is in reverse.

4) There are the Destructive non conformists. These folks step over the boundaries of goodness, integrity and true justice...These are the people without scruples who will do anything to achieve their ends- like saying that the US election was stolen and lying about it or invading Ukraine. They are in all walks of life and very often in positions of power. They are also the terrorists of the world. They are the hardest criminals to catch. They are not predictable because they do not conform to patterns. They are too creative for that. They have simply put, creativity, but without ethics.

5) The 5<sup>th</sup> category is our theme for this day! The **creative constructive non conformists** are the founders of religious traditions and are often the pioneers of great business enterprises- these are the people of imagination and courage who think outside the parameters. They are the ones to emulate in order to change the world for the better. Jesus, Buddha, Moses and Mohammed are in this category as well as the Henry Fords, the Thomas Edisons and the Walt Disneys of this world. Mother Theresa was one as was Nelson Mandela and Martin Luther King Jnr.

What are they Like?

- They are highly intelligent and original in their thinking
- They have strong intellectual drive
- They can tolerate shades of grey
- They think outside the box
- They can resist peer pressure when it matters to do so
- They are more spontaneous than average
- They have empathy enough to walk a mile in another's shoes
- They will choose risk over security if there is a solid reason to do so

Do you know anybody like that?

I want today to get us all to think about unleashing our creativity, wherever we touch the world. In order to do that we need to release our blocked thinking.

Why don't we unleash our God given creativity, for after all, aren't we all made in the image of the Great Creator? That is ground breaking teaching in the Bible. In fact, it is good Biblical teaching to realize that we all are **co**-creators with God! So creativity comes naturally, its both nature and nurture.

Here however are the common blocks that cause us to put on the brakes.

- Low self esteem inhibits creativity
- Fear of criticism shuts us down
- Comparing ourselves to others who are more successful
- Negative words spoken over us by people in authority like: "You will never be able to do mathematics, so forget being a scientist. You can't study music, there is no money in the arts. What do you want to be? A starving artist?"

You need to get into technology. Oh? You can't do math? Too bad! You will never be a lawyer. You can't even remember to pay your parking fines."

- Living in the past inhibits creativity. "We have always done it this way" which famously are the 7 last words of the Church
- Creativity can threaten earnings, recognition, or a chance for advancement, so we learn to be silent when we have a good idea.

Let me ask you a question.

Does the institution you happen to work for reward creativity or enforce conformity?

By the way, companies that listen to their constructive non conformists are much more likely to thrive than those who listen only to their conformists, according to Lucius. D. Clay, business owner. He decided to promote anyone with a great idea even if it had nothing to do with the department, he or she worked in. Sadly, in most institutions people defend their turf and that can result in the loss of competitive edge.

Don Koberg and Jim Bagnell in their classic book The universal traveler, a soft systems guide to creativity say this: " As we age...we learn from our society that fault finders disturb the status quo of the normal average others. So, squelch tactics are introduced. It becomes good not to make waves or rock the boat...it

is bad thing to be considered a problem maker. And so, everything is upside down for creativity and its development.”

I am talking about this today, because as people of faith we are called upon **not** to stifle our God given creativity. It is easier isn't it to stay with the herd? And let's remember that conformity can lead to steady promotions. So why should people of faith take the hard road? Jesus could have stayed in Tiberias where he was popular. But instead he took the hard road to Jerusalem where he knew he would be done to death. Why do that?

Because Christ was into difficult loving.

The man looking at the broken TV in a church told me he was from Iraq. I asked him if he was Muslim. He said no he was not a person of faith but he did like one thing that Jesus taught. I asked what was that? He said “Jesus taught us to love the enemy and the world needs that.”

The repairman was right. Conformity said to kill one's enemies. Jesus said to love them, a message the world is still reluctant to believe.

The great ones of the world all know what I am talking about today. They were, or are, the constructive non conformists.

If Jesus was crucified for one central reason it was surely this: because he loved unconditionally, and that made him not conform to accepted standards, and so he paid with his life.

### **But the world was better for this!**

The Great Semmelweis was a doctor before the understanding of contamination caused by bacteria.

All his life he was a constructive non conformist. His peers could not see the value in washing their hands before medical procedures. Semmelweis attempted to convince them with multiple proofs. Finally, in order to prove his point that doctors needed to wash their hands before doing a procedure, he deliberately cut himself with a dirty instrument. He got infected and died to conclusively prove his case. Result?

His contemporaries still did not believe him. So Sad! Such a great man!

### **But the world was better for this!**

Remember Thomas Edison? He said that it takes 8-10 years before an invention is accepted and in that time period one can expect frustration,

disbelief and scorn. To ridicule and disbelief, Edison struggled on with over 1000 failures before he managed to create a light bulb that would stay lit for a long enough period to be useful. Where would we be today without Edison's electric light and Semmelweis sterilization procedures needed for delicate surgeries that save lives or to defend against the Corona Virus? When there are emergencies of any kind that are life threatening, light is required to solve problems. Time and time again Edison had to risk his good reputation in order to unleash his creativity.

### **And the world was better for this.**

Jesus rewarded constructive non conformists: like small in stature Zacchaeus, who climbed a tree to see Jesus, or the woman who touched him to be healed when Jesus was in a crowd; or the thief on the cross who did not identify with the other criminal but who saw who Jesus was and reached out to him. In turn Jesus reached back to him, not treating him like a criminal but, saying to the thief "This day shalt thou be in Paradise with me."

Jesus was consistently a constructive non conformist. That is why we often ask What would Jesus do? ***Because that question is meant to be lovingly constructive, and always gets us to think outside the box.***

As Francis wrote in his famous poem about Jesus and his lack of conformity to society's norms:

"He never wrote a book. He never held an office. He never went to college. He never visited a big city. He never travelled more than two hundred miles from the place where he was born. He did none of the things usually associated with greatness..

Nineteen centuries have come and gone...

All the armies that have ever marched. All the navies that have ever sailed. All the parliaments that have ever sat. All the kings that ever reigned, put together, have not affected the life of mankind on earth as powerfully as that one solitary life."

Jesus was a creative non conformist who loved unconditionally and challenged an unjust status quo with his life and death.

This was His quest to follow that star that heralded his birth ...  
No matter how hopeless, no matter how far ...  
To fight for the right, without question or pause ...  
To be willing to march into Hell, for a Heavenly cause ...

**And the world will be better for this:**

That one man, scorned and covered with scars,  
Still strove, with his last ounce of courage,  
To reach ... the unreachable star ...  
The promise at his starlit birth was peace on earth, good will towards human beings. It still proves to be an unreachable star, but He strove for it anyway!

Whatever problem it is that has stymied you, that elusive job, that loving relationship, that quest for meaning in life, I challenge you today to break out of the parameters that bind you! It is time to make a roof a door. To remove with prayer your roadblocks to happiness.

God made us all to be problem solvers. The world needs our creative compassion. There are many problems all around us that we could solve with our God given creativity.

Knox has been through the wringer. First of all there was the attempt to join with St. Andrews. Good strong people left Knox over that making St. Andrews stronger, which is a good thing, and making Knox weaker- a sad thing in my view.

Then there was Covid which emptied churches everywhere and broke social bonds. We are still recovering from that impact.

Then there was the sale of Knox to BMI. People left over that.

Today we are where we are and here is the good news: Knox is no longer responsible for maintenance and insurance of the building. If we could but see it, Knox is potentially able to be stronger because we can focus now on ministry. But this will require creativity, openness to new ideas, flexibility and a belief that we can seek God's guidance as to how best to move forward.

The good news is that there are leaders in Knox who see the opportunity that lies before us. Oh, how I wish we could turn this corner and help Knox to thrive again!

As the poet Tennyson wrote in his famous Ulysses:

Come, my friends,  
'Tis not too late to seek a newer world.  
Though much is taken, much abides; and though  
We are not now that strength which in old days  
Moved earth and heaven, that which we are, we are,  
One equal temper of heroic hearts,  
Made weak by time and fate, but strong in will  
To strive, to seek, to find, and not to yield.

The reaction of the people in Christ's day, when they saw an unyielding creative, constructive, non conformist at work was to say: "We have never seen anything like this before!"

When we begin to think like the four friends of the paralytic, we will experience the joy they must have felt, when they saw their friend stand up and walk for the very first time!

For like them, we will have the most holy and humbling privilege, **of actually seeing God at work! For remember, with God all things are possible.**

**And the world will be better for this!**

**So will Knox!**

**Amen.**