

**March 5, 2023 Second Sunday in Lent, Confirmation, Arts and Faith  
Ladue Chapel Presbyterian Church  
Exodus 35:30-35**

**John 3:1-17**

**“God’s Tapestry”**

**Anne Peacock**

**“Mom, aren’t you supposed to be going somewhere?” It was the summer of 2015, and I couldn’t get myself in the car to drive to a monastery where I had planned to stay by myself for a week. Finally, my daughter Tori nudged me out the door. Along the way, I thought how much easier it would have been to take the week off in the comfort of my home. It’s so much easier to stay put than go out into the unknown, isn’t it? Why was I setting out on this journey? I knew in my heart I had to go. While driving, I noticed small puffy clouds; a rare sight in St. Louis summers. My anxious mind calmed as I thought of being surrounded by a great cloud of witnesses. You. We can’t do these things alone. We need each other! That thought remained with me throughout the week as I remembered those who had encouraged me along the way. Like the people of God in the wilderness, heading into the unknown; guided by clouds and faith.**

**When we move away from fear and enter the unknown, the Spirit enables us to express the beauty of our soul. Nicodemus could not understand Jesus’ message because he was not willing to enter that vulnerable place. Even he, a highly respected teacher of Israel, did not understand the language of the Spirit – the language of creativity and mystery. It was so far from what he had been taught. “What does it mean to be born of water and Spirit from above? Aren’t we born only once?” Nicodemus asked... “How can these things be?”**

**My husband Steve vividly recalls his childhood baptism in the Baptist faith. He was sure he would step out of that water and feel brand new, and he was so disappointed when he felt like the same person as before.**

**Thomas Merton said, *To be born again is not to become somebody else, but to become ourselves.* But how do we become ourselves?**

**What do you remember as your very first memory, before your parents and the world shaped you? What were you like? What did you enjoy doing? These memories offer us a glimpse of who we were created to be in the image of God. If we spend time in contemplation, noticing and hearing God's word for us, our lives can be transformed – born from above. This is not a new body or a completely new life, but a fullness of life expressed through our authentic self.**

**As a child of this church, my understanding of faith through the years was the face of you – a great cloud of witnesses encouraging me along the way. Wes Mellow and Fred Heger were my Sunday School teachers. Many of you have been my mentors, shaping my life of faith by listening and sharing stories with me over the years. Through these times together, I have come to know you and you have come to know me.**

**We don't really know each other until we spend time together. What we see first is the surface, like the bark of a tree with so much hidden beauty underneath. By allowing ourselves to be vulnerable, sharing stories and uncovering our uniqueness, our true selves can be revealed.**

**I once heard an artist describe how the wood speaks to him, telling him what it wants. Often the artist's plan must be set aside so that the wood's desires can be revealed. Beauty created by cracks, worm holes, bark, stains, bacterial decay and water all play a part in making a piece come alive. Although the cells have long since stopped being active, the wood of a tree has life. As nature works on the wood, it transforms. The artist's plan must adapt to what is discovered after layer by layer the wood's true nature is revealed.**

**God's creative work integrates the world of nature and the work of our own hands. When building the tabernacle as described in the book of Exodus, skilled craftsmen used precious metals, products of God's own creation, which gave shape to its beauty and mirrored God's own work. We are created in the image of God, and what we create is also a reflection of God - for the whole world.**

**Bezalel, chief architect, and designer of the tabernacle, and his partner Oholiab, are the first biblical examples of human beings filled with the Holy Spirit. When**

God chooses people for a particular work, he also equips them to do it. These craftsmen's skills are spiritual gifts for the service of God, but artisans do not create quickly. They take time to carefully learn the craft, practice discipline, and patiently allow space to listen to the material and understand it with depth. The book of Exodus mentions specific shape, design, intricate embroidery, and colors. The repetition of these details shows the importance of this portable sanctuary built according to the will of God so that God could dwell among the people. There is also an emphasis on making, weaving, and joining, not on picturing the completed whole. Through patience and trust, artists learn to be okay with vulnerability and mystery, not knowing what the finished product will become.

Lori Kochanski creates art from fabric and stories, and she wove the stole I am wearing today. I gave her materials that were full of memories and were very special to me. Neither of us knew what the finished piece would become, but we trusted the process and knew that God would and does reside within the pattern. Lori transformed my cherished memories into something beautiful and new. This new stole is more meaningful to me now than the materials that were woven into it.

God the Creator and Artist invites us to create through the gifts of our authentic selves. Vicki LeResche created a stunning exhibit of needlework by our members, which you may view in the display cases during fellowship time. Jeanne Wilton makes sure we have cookies every Sunday morning, Eldon Ball shared his poetry with our *lectio divina* group, Lucy Kerr, tea connoisseur, hosted tea at our Arts and Faith event yesterday. By the way, my favorite was her butterfly pea flower tea! David Erwin and choir members weave notes through organ and song, Avery Warwick shared her gift of hospitality during our pancake breakfast. Lynn Smith offered to create floral arrangements for our arts and faith events this weekend. I didn't know about her hidden gift! And here are a few of her beautiful creations reflecting today's scripture. The list goes on and on...all of this beauty created by the work of our hands – an expression of ourselves offered to the world.

**Bread and wine would not exist on their own without humans who cultivate and create. One of the ways I experience God is through the mystery of baking bread. Adding leaven, or yeast, to just three ingredients, flour, water and salt, creates a living dough that can grow and transform. As the dough is kneaded and the flour absorbs liquid, the gluten creates a web-like tapestry which provides necessary support and structure for the rising dough. While it rests and ferments, it is transformed and becomes much softer and lighter. Adding heat transfigures it further into an edible loaf of bread.**

**One day, I showed a group at church how to bake bread and sent them home with some dough to nurture and bake for themselves. I received a frantic call from David Curtis later that evening. “Help, Anne! How do I stop the dough? It burst out of the bag and is flowing all over the counter!” (*David, this dough is for you!*) This reminds me of how God takes our faith, which begins as small as a mustard seed or yeast spore and allows it to burst forth and grow more than we can imagine. Bread is so ordinary; full of mystery and sustenance. Humble ingredients binding together and creating something greater than they could on their own. God has called us to something greater than just ourselves – to join in community to create something new.**

**Ladue Chapel’s Tapestry of Faith, which Lori is weaving for our congregation, is a new creation from the storied fabric of your life, my life, our lives. And God will reside within the pattern. This will be a symbol of our family of faith with unique personalities and spiritual gifts. We hope you will add some fabric from your life to this living tapestry. A few weeks ago, each member of our confirmation class chose a colored ribbon representing who they are, and Lori has been weaving these ribbons during today’s service. After the service, you are invited to meet Lori and weave part of this tapestry on her loom. And once completed, we will have an opportunity to gather as a community and share our stories. The finished tapestry will contain the colors and textures of a great cloud of witnesses living alongside each other, woven together with love, and supporting each other as one body of Christ.**

**Japanese artist Makoto Fujimura says, “Artists and makers can help us love more deeply. Love demands creativity. Love is the language of the Spirit.**

Through love, the Spirit guides us.” Nicodemus was guided by the Spirit. We don’t know much about him because he is mentioned only three times in the Bible. He meets with Jesus at night out of fear that others might see him in the light of day. Nicodemus also seems uncomfortable with Jesus’ incomprehensible vocabulary about the Spirit and the wind blowing where it chooses. Artists also begin with fear – fear that what we create won’t be liked by others or good enough. But artists learn to move past that fear. They take the materials of life and make something beautiful. Fujimura says, “It is through the threads of suffering, persecution, and life’s difficulties that God weaves a tapestry of hope toward the New.”

Holy Saturday is a day of waiting, and we can prepare during this season of Lent by practicing waiting. Art, poetry, and music all depend on waiting. This perceived emptiness is needed to create so that we might experience the fullness of our lives. Painters begin with a blank canvas, important things happen between the spaces of words, and the rests between notes allow the music to live and breathe. Sabbath is necessary to rest in God – to listen, to breathe, and to create.

We are going to enter into two minutes of silence. As we do, you may wish to reflect on the poem about to be shared by Gretchen Ross and members of her family. Maybe you will think of your ancestors and others who have supported you along your faith journey. Or maybe you will listen to the gentle rhythm of the loom. Who are you at the core? Where is your heart leading you? What might you be called to create and express in the world? Then in the second minute of silence, I invite you to gently move those words and thoughts aside, wait, and simply rest in God - a place where God may whisper to you – a place where you may come to know more deeply who God created you to be and to become. A bell will sound as we enter silence and it will sound again to bring us out of silence.

*Gretchen Ross and family now read poem “The Walls” by Susan Cherwien*

“The wind blows where it chooses, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit.”

**“Mom, aren’t you supposed to be going somewhere?” That voice of my own child was like the voice of God gently asking, “Anne, aren’t you supposed to be going somewhere?” God is always with us, journeying through the wilderness and calling us home to ourselves. Moving through fear allows space for the Spirit to enter so we can be born again and again and again.**

**What is being born in you today? What is being born in our church?**

**Like living dough, we are called to burst forth into the world allowing our creative energy to touch and weave through all of creation, transforming the world in ways we never thought possible. And like the portable sanctuary in the desert, God chooses to accompany us along the way, weaving and flowing in all and through all.**

**In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, Amen.**

## V. THE WALLS

How many voices have sung  
in this place?  
How many hymns have rung out  
in this place?  
How many tears have fallen  
in this place?  
How many feet have stepped  
in this place?  
How many Lord's Prayers have echoed  
in this place?  
These walls resonate  
these walls vibrate  
with the wonder  
of generations  
These walls echo  
with the heartbeats  
of ancestors and friends  
Nothing disappears without a trace  
in this creation.  
Love and high aspiration  
Grief and adoration  
Live in these walls  
The heartbeats of generations  
live in these walls.  
Their yearning toward God  
lives in these walls.  
Whispering to us  
Encouraging us  
Echoing in us.  
Singing with us.

Susan Cherwien  
"From Glory Into Glory"