

THE STUCK SYNDROME

ARTICLE 4: TAKING A CREATIVE PLUNGE

No one was bored when Jesus spoke. On the contrary, huge crowds of many thousands would even forsake food and rest to hear him speak. The apostle Paul did manage to put one of his listeners to sleep once, and he fell out the window to a short death. But Jesus did not put people to sleep. People were enamored with Him. His teaching scratched them where they itched, His preaching poked to life dead embers in their hearts, everything about Him drew them in. Of course, there are many reasons for this, but a significant reason is, Jesus was the Son of Creator God. Not only was He creative, the very presence of His being, created.

A church that is stuck is characteristically uncreative. This is a strange irony in that although we claim to be worshippers of, and acquainted with, The Creator of everything, we ourselves may be gravely lacking in this quality. In consideration of our God, it seems that the Church should be the most creative entity in society. But such is not the case. I once watched a television documentary on the creative energy that went into developing a new cup noodle. From the home-style taste of the miso base soup, to the unusual mushrooms and the vibrant packaging it was a creative masterpiece, when it comes to instant noodles, that is. I remember at the time thinking, that cup noodle is more creative than many churches I have been in.

There are many churches that make excuses for lack of creativity. Perhaps there is fear that too much variety or decoration will turn worship into mere entertainment. But consider how immersion into God's creative world enhances our praise. Is not a breath of vibrant mountain air and a delving into the flower-laden meadows and swirling clouds overhead a wonderful path to rhapsodic worship? Too often there is also the excusing of creativity in preaching the word. We do this by saying that the Word of God is powerful in and of itself. All too often a sermon consists of reading the Bible verses, and then reiterating the obvious, in a way that almost insults the intelligence of the hearer, and violates their God given longing for creativity. Certainly the Scriptures are powerful, but they exert their power upon entering into the heart and mind. God gives us the creativity to hook men as skillful fishermen would. The choice of bait is crucial in any fishing endeavor. Jesus Himself used creative methods of teaching besides the fact that the lame were walking, the blind were seeing, and the dead were being raised when he came to town. So do we really have an excuse?

The modern study of creativity has been progressing for about half a century now. Many more theories have been generated than I wish to know and books on the subject abound

(ironically, many with a definitely uncreative style). It is interesting that one of the foremost students of creativity, Howard Gruber, did his most famous study of creativity in, who would have imagined but Charles Darwin. Darwin was an amazing person. In his struggle to understand life he toyed with endless lists of thoughts, images, dreams, and arguments, which he ordered and reordered. The irony is that although he is known for his exclusion of God in the role of life, and promoted ideas that excluded God for many others with the theories of evolution, he was displaying in his own behavior evidence of the creative nature of the God in whose image he was created.

But, practically, why is creativity so important? There are a number of big reasons. First, creativity imparts new life to a church that is basically surviving from Sunday to Sunday. Not only can it revive our dulled minds, but also it can help us begin to make connection with a world that is in constant change. Always remember, what works today will not work tomorrow, our creativity must always be flowing like a fresh stream in our midst.

Another reason creativity is so important is that it helps us to see things differently, to view our problems and challenges in a whole new way. Seeing our challenges in a new way helps us to address them differently, instead of being stuck in the same old patterns of action.

But I particularly love creativity because it defines the new reality. A particularly creative bunch that we often overlook is the bazaar group known as Sci Fi writers. It is truly amazing that the technology we take for granted today was once what people laughed at. The idea of men in space, or machines that talked or made cars, or little devices that you could use to talk to someone else in another part of the country or world. Sci Fi writers dreamed it all up first, then scientists got to work. Now all the things that people used to roll their eyes over, are obvious realities. Sci Fi writers of yesterday created the technological world we know today. So if it seems ridiculous today, it is likely reality tomorrow. Take to heart that Einstein said; "Imagination and creativity are more important than knowledge."

It is a delight to see abundant creativity in the church. I have enjoyed seeing a middle aged friend exploring the idea of soba dendo. Apparently, he invites couples over. Then the men make the noodles by hand, and everyone eats them together. Needless to say they share Christ in the experience. It was fun in our ministry to hand out free DVD copies of the Jesus movie, even before people had many DVD titles to choose from. I appreciate my friend Arthur Hollands pioneering evangelism in the body building world, the yakuza world, and the biker world now as he rides a Harley Davidson. I saw my

father reap great fruit 25 years ago when he started an English school with chapel times, and people paid good money to hear the Word preached. I look forward to seeing churches teach unsaved mothers about their child and the Internet, or how to make fabulous homepages, or how to tune into their emotional lives, and of course, introducing Creator God at the same time. Postmoderns of today are reached through their imagination. Churches need to seriously consider how to tantalize all those children growing up addicted to a virtual world of games and visuals.

One thing I have learned about creativity is that it takes time to grow. It is a lot like a muscle and needs exercise to bulge, and begin to move mountains. Some time back I began inventing bedtime stories for my children. We would lie on the bed and I would try to weave a tale. It was hard to graduate beyond The Three Little Pigs or Little Red Riding Hood, and to make up my own story was next to excruciating. But night after night it got easier. It was not long before I was inventing tales of secret faeries, horrible ogres, talking slugs, magical treasures and my children where captivated. In a strange way these adventures materialized and the end would often surprise me like the placing of the last piece in a puzzle. And the spiritual truths connected with these stories have a tendency to wedge deep within their hearts.

John Steinbeck wrote that; “Ideas are like rabbits. You get a couple and learn how to handle them, and pretty soon you have a dozen.” I believe the Creator God gave us an amazing capacity we have yet to tap. It is like a tunnel deep in our minds, turning here and turning there, and teeming with little rabbits. Could it be that if we ask Him, he might help us to find them, and to overrun us with new creation?