

TEXT: Ephesians 2:10
THEME: We are God's handiwork
SUBJECT: *Poiesis*
TITLE: Behold Humankind

Fourth Sunday in Lent
14 March 2021
Messiah Moravian
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We are not the center of anything. Black holes have taught us how small we are in the vastness of what is beyond us and what has happened so far. We can be forgiven for believing that all our questions about ourselves are insignificant, all our vices and virtues but sound and fury signifying nothing, all our hopes and dreams but dust blown along the trajectories of light years, borne away on waves of gravity we can't see towards the unimaginable.

But we are significant. We are significant to each other. We are mysteries to ourselves, mysteries we hold out to each other in every encounter. The mysteries in which we are immersed still call out to our curiosity to understand.

We are fragile, dwelling in a fragile life-system made entirely possible by being where earth is in a solar system at the quiet edge of a galaxy. We may be alone. We may not. This may not be the only universe. Nevertheless, none of this reduces our significance or the significance of what surrounds us. Staring into the piercing brightness of the stars remains wondrous.

Like the light traveling from all those distant stars, light going back billions of years, everything we do here is beamed out there announcing "we are here"; everything good and everything bad. In this way we fill the universe or one of the many multiverses with the particles of energies science is still exploring.

Whatever memorials we leave, our stories, births and deaths, are not written in stone. They are composed of dust, rain and ice crystals; sucrose, proteins and fatty acids. That doesn't mean our living makes no difference. What it means is that we are not what we tell ourselves: we *are* important, just not *all*-important. In the Great Chain of Being, we may be a little lower than the angels, but we are dependent upon a complex ecosystem of which we are stewards not owners.

The author of Ephesians declares we are God's *handiwork*, just as the universe is or the many multiverses are. The Greek word translated "handiwork" is *poiesis*. It refers to creative action. It draws into visibility that which is invisible and in this way creates anew. The creative act of *poiesis* relates to the truth that emerges only in and through the act of creation. An act of *poiesis* refashions the world in a way that promotes the flourishing of life.

We are God's *handiwork* created for good works. Our works, however, are not only or always good. We are capable of incomprehensible evil, as the author of Ephesians makes clear. Who is not haunted by the photograph of the girl running burned and terrified from the Napalm bombing of a village in Vietnam, clips of people leaping from the roof of the World Trade Center, images of the brutal assault on the Capital on January 06? Evidence abounds for the Gospel writer's

assertion: “. . .the light has come into the world, and people loved darkness rather than light because their deeds were evil.” (John 3:19)

I am haunted by James Baldwin’s response to the murder of Martin Luther King, Jr. “Perhaps even more than the death itself, the manner of his death has forced me into a judgment concerning human life and human beings which I have always been reluctant to make. Incontestably, alas, most people are not, in action, worth very much; and yet, every human being is an unprecedented miracle. One tries to treat them as the miracles they are, while trying to protect oneself against the disasters they’ve become.”

The miracles we are, the disasters we have become. If we are God’s handiwork, God’s creative act, God’s work of art, created for good works, then *poiesis* is our purpose. We are God’s creation created to be creators who “paint the walls of life with light” (Lawrence Ferlinghetti).

Why is art made? To be beautiful. To compel. To express the vision of the artist. We are not art made to sit on a mantle or in a glass case protected for life. We are made to do good creatively. We are created by God to express God’s own heart and vision in the world in an active way, to bring good and beautiful things to life.

We don’t have to do good works that attract the attention of the Nobel Peace Prize Committee. Anyone can paint the walls of life with light, if they so choose.

Jack Swanson, a seven year old Texas boy heard that the local mosque had been vandalized in a hate crime. That very same afternoon he gave every penny of the \$20 he had accumulated over quite some time to the mosque. While \$20 may not seem like much, it was everything to that little boy. Jesus said the kingdom of heaven belongs to boys like Jack. (Matthew 19:14)

When Carol Suchman walked by a for rent party store in NYC she saw an opportunity. Toys, school supplies and stuffed animals lined the shelves. After negotiating with the owner she was able to buy the store in its entirety. She bagged it all up and donated it the Department of Homeless Services, ensuring that every child, no matter what their situation, would have something on Christmas morning.

Tommy Kleyn, a Dutch man, was tired of seeing trash on the waterfront by his commute to work so he decided to pick it up himself. Bags upon bags of trash were gathered over time, with volunteers coming through regularly to help out. Every day he would fill a bag of trash. Thanks to his efforts a rare bird was able to nest in the bank, which hadn’t happened in years. People would tell Kleyn that there should be more people like him. “What’s stopping you from finding a way to make a difference,” he would ask?

Some people do paint with larger brushes. Former President Jimmy Carter’s lifelong commitment to human rights has yielded a full and fulfilling life. He notes, “Quite often, when you try to help

others—which should be an important part of your life—you find that that’s the most gratifying, enjoyable and adventurous thing that you can do.”

Just ask Josh Cyganik who was working as a track inspector across the street from Leonard Bullock’s home when he overheard some teenagers making fun of the condition of his house. Cyganik could tell the comments bothered the elderly man, so he rallied some volunteers and fixed up the place. With donated supplies, volunteers were able to repair the front porch and give the home a fresh coat of paint.

Bullock and his wife were ecstatic. “According to the media, I’m a hero. I’m not a hero; I just heard something that bothered me,” Cyganik said. “Anyone would have done the same thing. Everyone has it in their heart to do things like this.”

When we act creatively for the good of others, we fulfill our purpose in creation: *poiesis*. That is why such work is gratifying, enjoyable and adventurous.

(This sermon is indebted to the work of theologian Graham Ward.)

PRAYER: St Denys the Areopagite (c. 440-c. 530) a Syrian monk

“Beckoning Beauty”

It is forever so—

 unvarying, unchanging—
 beautiful but not

as something

 coming into birth
 or falling into death,

and not as what

 might grow or might
 decay, nor is it

beautiful *now* and otherwise *then*.

 It is in itself and of itself
 the uniquely and eternally

beautiful, and the great creating

 cause that beckons
 all creation, and holds

all things in the pulse

 of its existence,
 bears them, keeps them

by the longing within them

 to share in what it is—which is
 to say, to share in what is beautiful.