

## Sermon - Called to Co-create - Rev Amelia

We were created by an infinitely creative God to reflect his love and character to the world. One way we do that is by continuing God's creative work.

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When God created Humankind – God made them - Adam and Eve – to reflect God's very image.

*Have mercy on me, O God, according to your steadfast love... (Ps 51:1)*

I have a lovely book by Michelle Gonzalez:

Created in God's image

It is a book about theological anthropology. It is also written by a woman's has a woman's questions about how gender challenges us to think about God and our response to God.

I found Michelle Gonzalez challenging me to think of God as our Mother, the Author and bearer of life. Beyond that, God invites us into God's own creative character and work. As someone with a creative arts background, I find it immensely attractive to consider that making art and music may be sacred callings, but creative thinking and the development of Holy imagination are also acts of creativity. The cultivation of holy imagination is, for me at least, a key reason for doing theology. It is about talking about and getting to know God's ways and ideas, so we can participate in God's life. We can create... and we are at our best when we create with God. If we are made in the image of the Creator – surely, we must also be creative?

It is also true that sometimes we create without God and without considering God's good desires for us. Clive often teaches us about the idea of the Anthropocene. That is – we live in an age where what we do, as humans, influences the planet and all creation. We have power to work for good or evil. How we live, individually and collectively, changes the future of the earth.

This month we have spent a few short weeks thinking about Creation. The planet is no longer something we live on or with, but something we shape and modify. We tear down and we re-build. So – as disciples, we must ask the question – is our behaviour as creators, builders, innovators, influencers – part of God's plan and part of God's mission? Does our call to create take us into new imaginings, embedded in God's imagination OR is our contribution more focused on ourselves and our own more limited vision?

As faithful people of God, we ask God to search us and keep remaking us. We have a built-in holistic desire and longing to be better, more holy, more complete – fit to live life to the full. To enter into that fullness, we have to cultivate the courage to extend ourselves beyond the known and be prepared to make glorious mistakes as we learn new skills and new directions and new ways of loving.

*Restore to me the joy of your salvation, and sustain in me a willing spirit.*

In an effort to think about the new, I looked this week at McCrindle's most recent research about how society is evolving during COVID times. Having journeyed with so many uni students this year in their struggles with loss of jobs and limited access to campuses, I was interested to hear of a new term for those who have had to move back into their parents' homes:

KIPPERS = Kids in Parents Pockets Eroding Retirement Savings

Of course, it is not just about the emerging COVID recession (or depression). Young adults have, for some years, been finding that staying at home while studying has significant advantages, but the lack of part-time work prospects while studying and limited work possibilities on graduation will see more people in their 20s and 30s staying with parents who may also be struggling to keep a job.

Of those who do still have jobs, the McCrindle research showed:

42% Australians believe that the most negative impact of COVID is social isolation

44% Australians believe the challenges of working from home have contributed to social isolation

“To some work is simply a job. To many more it’s a lifeline to social, relational interaction...”

Only 14% want to work from home. Only 25% believe working from workplace is the future...

62% of people believe that the future of work will be a hybrid mix of home and workplace. Mobility is expected and wellbeing will be prioritized.

It is likely that the experience of workers, at Parramatta and Westmead (where our church sites are), and at Auburn and Blacktown (and other places where we have homegroups), will change dramatically. ‘Hybrid work’ will have a mix where people work a couple of days from home and ‘come in’ on particular days when they will emphasize collaboration, connection and relationship. On the few days when people come to a common workplace, there will be an emphasis on being with others. It challenges us to think about how will church change to meet the needs of the communities in which we are placed?

70% of workers believe there is a shift to prioritise employee wellbeing. Many workplaces are looking for support in developing wellbeing.

62% of employed workers state that mental health and work stress will be the biggest influence on the future of work. We know the link between mental health and spiritual support and wellbeing.

The McCrindle researchers suggest three areas to focus on as we approach 2021:

1. **Build Culture** – *Create in me a clean heart, O God! And kindle a right spirit in me.* The character and personality of your community. It is the sum of values, beliefs, relationships, behaviours and attitudes.
2. **Focus on Purpose** – *Let me hear joy and gladness; let the bones that you have crushed rejoice.* Mission, Vision and Values. People leave, not because there is a compelling reason to leave, but because there is no compelling reason to stay. When we embody the Mission, Vision and Values, we glow when we celebrate being part of our community.
3. **Create and Re-create to the Purpose** - *Do good to Zion in your good pleasure; rebuild the walls of Jerusalem.* [Contribute, be Challenged, Celebrate] The McCrindle researchers pose the question: “Are we really waiting for a ‘return to normal’ or are we ready to build something different?” As people shaped by the stories in the scriptures, we might remember Lot’s wife or the people who wanted to return to Egypt, rather than remembering that God calls us into a future where the emphasis on faith, rather than certainty, means we must practice prayer, encouragement and be pilgrims on the way to a promised goal.

But it can feel so hard to set out to enter a future I do not know and understand... says Moses to God. God releases him from the burden after 40 years in the wilderness, but allows Moses to see that Joshua – the new generation – will adventure into a future beyond what Moses will ever experience. I like to think of the later Transfiguration story as Jesus being able to call Moses and Elijah back to look down from on top of the mountains and reassure the:

‘See – it may have taken a while, and it will take more work yet, but I have a really big plan and your small part has been important and foundational for a heavenly future.’

With all the talk of an uncertain future, it can feel pretty unsettling. What have we to offer? Who are we in all this? Here is where I can share good news with you.

We are Children of God!

We are Beloved of God.

We are made to be imaginative, creative and relational.

We are people who can and will encourage one another.

We are people whose small acts of kindness can be lifelines of blessing and signs of God’s goodness.

Our work and creativity can seem almost inconsequential in the moment of activity and it is only years later we discover the inspiration a comment or shared slice or phone call made in someone’s life. This week, a member of the congregation blessed me with a coffee/breakfast meeting. It was so lovely to share in the honest deep love of God together and also share about the joys and challenges of church. I was reminded of the saints of the past who held me in faith and the role each of us has as companions in discipleship.

It is as we support one another that we find ourselves supported too. When we visit a group home or a prison, or serve in the meals or hospitality activities, if we take the time to notice, we may be blest and strengthened by others. When we call or write or give, we may find ourselves unexpectedly receiving.

Creativity and imagination are not for dreaming by ourselves. The James reading reminds us to be generous givers - It is when dreams and ideas are shared that they can become visions and inspirations. Cultivate your creativity – bake a slice, draw an idea, share what inspires you. It is a way of encouraging all of us.

#### James 1:16-17 (NRSV)

Every generous act of giving, with every perfect gift, is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change. In fulfilment of his own purpose he gave us birth by the word of truth, so that we would become a kind of first fruits of his creatures.

*The following is an inspirational prayer from Searching for Sunday, by Rachel Held Evans.  
The prayer is adapted from the original by Alcuin of York:*

**God go with us. Help us to be an honour to the church.  
Give us the grace to follow Christ’s word,  
To be clear in our task and careful in our speech.  
Give us open hands and joyful hearts.  
Let Christ be on our lips.  
May our lives reflect a love of truth and compassion.  
Let no one come to us and go away sad.  
May we offer hope to the poor,  
And solace to the disheartened.  
Let us so walk before God’s people,  
That those who follow us might come into God’s kingdom.  
Let us sow living seeds, words that are quick with life,**

**That faith may be the harvest in people's hearts.  
In word and in example let your light shine  
In the dark like the morning star.  
Do not allow the wealth of the world or its enchantment  
Flatter us into silence as to your truth.  
Do not permit the powerful, or judges,  
Or our dearest friends  
To keep us from professing what is right.  
Amen**