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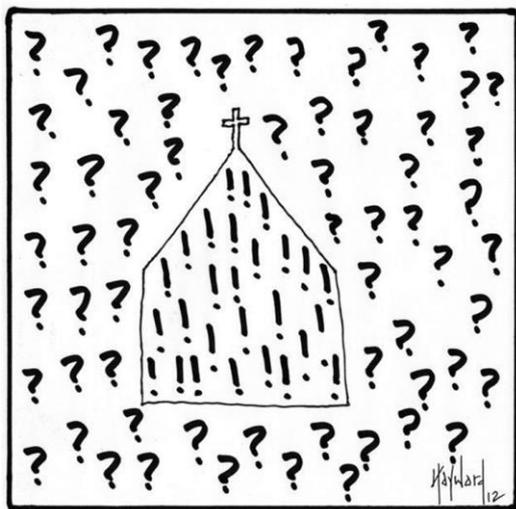
Creative solutions; kia kaha series
Exodus 35:30 – 35, Matthew 13:31 - 36

I invite you to think of a creative, innovative organization. What is the first name that came to mind? Was it a church?

Churches do not generally have a reputation for creativity. Perhaps traditional denominations like ours, even less so.

Why is that? What are some responses you've heard when someone suggests a creative idea?

- We've never done it that way before.
- We tried it and it didn't work.
- It's not Anglican (or Baptist or whatever).
- People won't like it.



Actually our church is made up of people who are creative and who often come to creative solutions in life's difficulties. In our final sermon in the Kia Kaha series I want to explore creativity because creativity, lateral thinking, refusing to be boxed in, leads us, with the Lord's enabling, to come to creative solutions.

We value creativity because we serve a creative God.

However you think the Lord did it, He created heaven and earth and everything in it.

He created tiny little plankton that can only be caught in a .1mm net.



There is a galaxy far, far away, called 1C1101 Super Galaxy that is 6 million light years across!

On earth Jesus was creative as a carpenter and a communicator.

Jesus spoke from hillsides, boats and beaches.

He drew in the sand, used a Roman coin, cursed a fig tree, and picked up a piece of bread.

He divided fish, turned over tables, and put a child on his knee – all to illustrate important lessons.

We are all creative

We are created in God's image. While there is some doubt about exactly what this means. We are certainly endowed with the characteristics of God; even if they are muddled somewhat. Just as our Lord is creative; so are we.

In the Old/First Testament story God chose specific tradesmen who were creative and skilled to collaborate with others in completing the Temple. Notice that they had the ability to teach others as well. Passing on our skill is an important part of creativity.

We are not all Leonardo Da Vincis or Luciano Pavarottis. However we all have gifts which are given for the benefit of the church community and the wider community.¹

Our various gifts lead us to creative solutions. For example a person with the gift of hospitality often knows how to provide for guests at very little financial cost. A person with the gift of generosity figures out how to give their money to good causes in ways that don't draw attention to themselves.

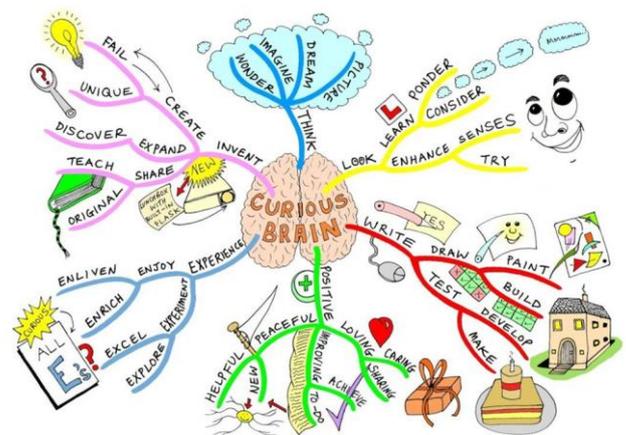
Creative solutions require us to cultivate curiosity.

We're born naturally curious, but we often lose this sense of curiosity over time. We're trained to stop asking so many questions. But let's retrain ourselves.

We used to think that once brain cells die, they're gone forever. Now, we know that the brain continues to grow and change throughout our lives.

Learning has long-term effects on our brains. As we learn ways of thinking and experiencing, we create new neural pathways. These pathways can stay in place, by reprogramming our brains. As we learn new skills, portions of our brains actually become larger. In the area of the brain responsible for learning and memory, the

hippocampus, new cells are created throughout our lives.²



Paul was on to something when he wrote to the Roman church “be transformed by the renewing of your minds.” Romans 12:2

Rather than assuming we know everything and making wrong assumptions about people and situations we are to be curious; to ask questions.

Jesus asked questions – lots of questions.

In the Gospels Jesus asks 307 questions. He is asked 183 questions. And he only answers 3!

Asking questions was central to Jesus' life and teachings.

Questions make people think for themselves. So do parables. There are around 46 of Jesus' parables recorded in the Gospels.³

² .brainupfl.org/2017/08/19/curiosity-changes-brain/

³ In fact Jesus was accused of only speaking in parables that people couldn't understand. Mat 13:10 – 15 That was at least partly because people were misunderstanding who he was anyway vv12& 13 ff. And some were not interested at all. And yet for some people parables explained what Jesus wanted to convey very well indeed. Mat 13:35

¹ Romans 12:6 – 8, 1 Corinthians 12:8 – 10, Ephesians 4:11 - 13

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So how did Jesus cultivate curiosity?

1. He sought his Father's example and advice.
2. He was present in the culture in which he lived both as a participant and keen observer.

Allow time

Think in the morning

Act in the noon

Eat in the evening

Sleep at night. William Blake



It takes time to listen but we can cultivate lifestyle of 'double listening'.

How do we do this?

Very simply we listen to God and to our community. We need the Lord's perspective and we need to be aware of what is happening in our culture.

Walter Wangerin Jr, in his book entitled *Whole Prayer*, says our communication with God is not complete until we have listened to him. It takes time to hear God speak – through the Bible, through creation, through others. It is often in the quiet that God speaks as he did to Elijah in 1 Kings 19.

Perhaps there are some everyday things we do that we could

deliberately transform into opportunities for God to speak. How might we do that? What activities could be part of our listening to God?

And listening to our culture; our community? That too takes time. We must make sure all our friends are not Christians. We need to read the papers and books by 'normal people'⁴ especially those we disagree with.

Creative solutions come when we hear God's perspective and know the context in which we live.

Collaborate

Jesus was a great collaborator. He was always hanging round with his mates and others on the fringe. He collaborated with people outside the norm eg discussing theology with the Samaritan woman. John 4:1 – 42

Sure he corrected people at times but he listened and responded when the time was right. And sure people let him down but he didn't give up.

Recently I met with a group of people to discuss pastoral care. One person in the group said "let's begin with what is working well." So we discussed those things and there were far more than I had initially thought. We came away with a plan based on things that would not have even occurred to me, had I done the planning myself.

We all know it and yet it is true:

Together
Everyone
Achieves
More

⁴ My code for people who are not Christians

So what is God inviting us to?

How is God encouraging us to be creative in the here and now? For some of us life is very hard; for others not so at this point of time.

“In difficult times my creative solution has been to rely more on God and for a bloke that is quite challenging. Last week we sang ‘Vagabonds’. The last verse was for me – ‘come self-sufficient!’” A parishioner.

Creative solutions certainly rely on us collaborating with God. And with each other. As we’ve pondered how we can get through difficult times, we’ve considered aspects such as:

- Being honest – Michaela is a fine example of learning to lament when life is hard.
- Finding focus on our loving God ; it’s easy to focus on the problems rather than the One who companions us every moment.
- Very often our situation is not fatal. Sometimes we are simply losing altitude but that doesn’t mean we will crash.
- When we compare our situations to others it can’t always be to those who have everything they need. There are many others around the world who are far worse off – especially those who are persecuted.
- Community – especially Christian community – is essential. We are in this together.
- It helps to have rhythms of rest and prayer especially Sabbath rest; things that reconnect us with God

- Following Jesus is not all about what we want but learning to live with him and for him
- Having realistic thinking (theology) that recognises this world is not fair never-the-less we serve a God who loves us and walks beside us
- A couple of weeks ago we were challenged about busyness; busyness that robs us of the things in life that are really important.

And in our final sermon in the Kia Kaha series we’ve discussed how we are created to be creative. Difficulties, challenges, problems; whatever you want to call the stuff of this life we live; these things cause us to think outside the box. They cause us to press into God and to work together. Difficulties take us to places we would never have chosen. We learn lessons that enrich and mature us. We experience blessings we would not have thought possible.

Yesterday morning I was walking with a church member. There was lots of talking with the walking. It hit me between the eyes that many of the difficulties we had both experienced had enriched us and equipped us for events that would follow. The experiences we had have mean we can empathise with others.

Certainly for myself, as I’ve been forced to seek creative solutions for various life events, I have grown in confidence. I’ve become more self-confident but only because I know (at least most of the time I know) that God loves me when I find a great creative solution and when I stuff the whole thing up.

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At funerals I always read from Romans about how nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus. The Message version puts it like this Jesus loves us. I'm absolutely convinced that nothing—nothing living or dead, angelic or demonic, today or tomorrow, high or low, thinkable or unthinkable—absolutely nothing can get between us and God's love because of the way that Jesus our Master has embraced us.

So what is God inviting you (us) to?

Much is not clear, yet we know the road we walk is full of creativity and leads to creative solutions.

Kia kaha

