

Creativity

This evening, I want to reflect on what the Bible has to say about creativity, beginning with Genesis chapter 1 and ending at Revelation 21. It will, necessarily, be little more than a brief overview.

Created to be creative creatures

Genesis 1 provides us with a wonderful portrait of God the creator. In wisdom and power, God brings the world – the whole universe – into being. And at the end of the sixth day, as the culmination of his creative work we read:

Then God said, “Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground.”

So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.

God blessed them and said to them, “Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground.” (Genesis 1:26-28)

Humankind, male and female together, are created in the image of God the creator. There is much that could be said on this theme – that we are created in the image of God – but the key point for us this evening is this, we are created to be creative creatures – creatures who make things. Look around you. There is little in our world that does not reflect the handiwork of human creativity.

God has given us the responsibility to rule over – govern – his world. We are to manage creation creatively, in the image of the one who created us and who formed all of creation.

All too often these verses in Genesis 1 have been taken as an excuse, even mandate, for the domination and exploitation of creation – using it for our own ends. But we are to manage creation as those who are made in the image of God the creator. At the end of Genesis 1 we read that God looked upon all that he had made and pronounced it to be “very good” (v.31). God blessed all that he had made (see Genesis 1:22,28). In imitation of him, our creativity is to result in what is “good”, even “very good” and it is to bring blessing to the whole of creation.

In Genesis 2:4-15, the passage that was read to us, God is described as giving Adam the task of caring for his garden – God’s garden. Gardens are places where human creativity is expressed in wonderful ways; not only in the grandeur of famous formal gardens which you may visit from time to time, but also in our far humbler gardens around our homes. We may have displays of wonderful colourful flowers or choose to grow prize-winning vegetables. Human creativity, in imitation of the creator, is not only to produce what is directly useful but also what is beautiful. Note that we read in Genesis 2:9:

The Lord God made all kinds of trees grow out of the ground – trees that were pleasing to the eye and good for food.

“Pleasing to the eye” is mentioned even before “good for food”. God’s creativity has produced a world extravagantly full of colour and beauty. Creativity is not purely utilitarian but is an expression of and satisfies our aesthetic senses. We create what is “pleasing to the eye” as well as what is useful.

But there is even more here in Genesis 2. Later in the chapter we read that Adam is given the task of naming the animals. To the Hebrew mind, naming is more than giving a useful handle to something, so that Adam can say, “Dog, come for a walk with me.” Naming is characterising and categorising. It is an intellectual exercise involving discernment, understanding and imagination. It involves language and communication. Here also is where creativity begins – in the mind and imagination before it finds expression in word and action – even as God created what was first in his mind and imagination through the power of his word.

In Genesis 2 we read also of the rivers that flowed from Eden:

The name of the first is the Pishon; it winds through the entire land of Havilah, where there is gold. (The gold of that land is good; aromatic resin and onyx are also there.) The name of the second river is the Gihon; it winds through the entire land of Cush. The name of the third river is the Tigris; it runs along the east side of Ashur. And the fourth river is the Euphrates. (Genesis 2:11-14)

There are hints here of human creativity in exploration, mining and the making of ornaments, jewellery and carved objects (gold and onyx) and of perfumes. Later, in Genesis 4:20-22 we read:

Adah gave birth to Jabal; he was the father of those who live in tents and raise livestock. His brother's name was Jubal; he was the father of all who play stringed instruments and pipes. Zillah also had a son, Tubal-Cain, who forged all kinds of tools out of bronze and iron.

Here we read of the making of tents, the making and playing of musical instruments and the making of tools of bronze and iron – the beginnings of technology.

Music is one of the most wonderful expressions of human creativity. Music pervades so much of our lives, yet we may ask, "What use is it?" It is more than utilitarian; it is a deep and wonderful expression of our creativity – an expression of creative imagination. It delights our hearts and touches the heart of our being. Liz and I love jazz, with its endlessly delightful and exuberant celebration of human creativity.

Human creativity is expressed in the arts – in painting and in sculpture. It is expressed in the crafts of pottery, imitating the Creature who formed mankind from the dust of the earth. It is expressed in woodworking and knitting, sewing, embroidery, patchwork and quilting – have you seen the wonderful, prizewinning, creative work of Monica? Creativity is displayed in architecture and buildings and in the humble décor of our own homes. Human creativity is expressed in literature and in poetry. The very word "poem" comes from a Greek word meaning "something made". For the ancients, poetry was one of the preeminent forms of human creativity – spinning a world out of words.

And here I would be so bold as to say, though I have a high view of Scripture as the word of God, that Scripture itself is a work of human creativity. It is written in human language through which God the creator speaks to us. Here, perhaps, is a supreme example of human creativity energised by the Spirit of the Creator (people wrote as they were propelled by the Spirit – 2 Peter 1:21) and resulting in that which brings glory to God the creator of all things. (Sermons also are expressions of human creativity: controlled creative imagination directed to bring glory to the Creator.)

Human creativity is expressed in 1,000 mundane ways, in every aspect of our lives. It is displayed in cookery, in the design and preparation of meals. I don't know whether you, like me, watch Master Chef. I love the invention test where the contestants are presented with a previously unseen selection of meat, fish, fruit, vegetables and spices and told they have limited time to see what they can make of it; something to delight the eyes and the nose and the taste. Cooking and the preparation of meals is an expression of human creativity.

Creativity is expressed in sport and in the playing of games. It is seen in the bending of the ball in football and the spinning of the ball in cricket. Intellectual creativity is seen in the playing of chess and in trying to find new moves that will outwit your opponent. It is even seen in humble games like Rock, Paper, Scissors to which the august and serious Radio 4 devoted a 30 minute documentary last week.

Creativity is expressed in the play of children. We have a dolls' house in one of the bedrooms in our house. The grandchildren love to go and play with it and, if you creep along the corridor and listen in the doorway while they are playing, you will hear them creating a world using the tiny dolls and telling each other stories of the life of these small inhabitants of the dolls' house. They are expressing delightful creativity in their play. When we drive home from church, Beabs who is only three and a quarter, will pick up one of her books and begin to read it. Sometimes it is in words we can understand, telling the story of the characters depicted in the book. Sometimes it is in a language entirely of her own making; that too is an expression of her creative imagination.

Creativity is seen not only in the arts but also in science and technology; in the making of glass lenses and the construction of telescopes by such as Galileo through to the construction of the Hubble Telescope and the Voyager space probe, launched 37 years ago which has just sent back such wonderful pictures of the surface of Pluto.

Praise God also for creativity in the medical sciences – for MRI and CT scanners and the skills of medical staff. I am filled with wonder and gratitude when I think that just over a year ago, surgeons opened up my heart and replaced my faulty and failing valve with a valve from a pig. I am here today in relatively good health because of a pacemaker inserted into my chest (a robot as my granddaughter called it) which keeps my heart beating regularly. Praise God for the creative work of the pharmaceutical industry that provides me with tablets to take the strain off my “pump”, as my cardiac nurse refers to it. We are fearfully and wonderfully made, but even here, human beings are cooperating with the God the creator that we may continue to be all that he created us to be.

Human creativity is seen in the wonders of computing and the marvels of modern technology. I have in my pocket a smart-phone. With this, earlier today, I spoke with and saw our older daughter who is currently on holiday in New Orleans. What a marvel of human creativity. Or think of the Sat Nav. A small device in your car can direct you (most of the time) to where you want to go, communicating with satellites 120 miles above you in the sky and plotting your exact position on the surface of the earth. Do you know how it does that? The most complicated maths is packed into this tiny device. It is a marvel of human ingenuity and creativity.

But human creativity, as with all human activity, can be used for perverted ends, rather than being used for good and to bring blessing. So much scientific research goes into the making of weapons of war; it always has. Satellite navigation was not first designed to take you safely to the right address but to direct cruise missiles to their designed destination.

Seventy years ago today, the second of the two atom bombs used in war was dropped on the Japanese city of Nagasaki. The two bombs dropped, the first on August 6th 1945 on Hiroshima and the second on August 9th on Nagasaki killed 200,000 people with many more to die later from the effects of their injuries and of radiation. Robert Oppenheimer, one of the scientists who worked on the Manhattan Project – making the atom bomb – when he saw its effects said it reminded him of words from the Bhagavad Gita, “Now I am become death, the destroyer of worlds.”

Human creativity, imagination, ingenuity and invention, can be turned to evil ends. Hitler’s death camps were a triumph of creative ingenuity in seeking to kill thousands, even millions, of people in the most efficient manner.

Creativity is not always a virtue. Creative accounting by financiers and bankers recently led to a crash in the financial markets which robbed many of their homes and more of their savings. All too often, human creativity, like the building of the Tower of Babel, is used for self-aggrandisement and for the domination and exploitation of others. It bears all the hallmarks of our fallenness rather than our created origin.

We are called to creativity, but to sanctified creativity. We are called to imitate God in creating that which is good and brings blessing to creation rather than destruction. We are called to creativity which is both the expression of and promoter of human flourishing.

A week ago, Nigel was speaking to us of the glory of Christ. He opened up to us Paul’s remarkable words in Colossians 1:15-20. In that passage, Paul, speaking of our Lord Jesus Christ says, “all things were created through him and for him” (Colossians 1:16). They were created by his agency, by his power, and they were created for his glory. So, human creativity which imitates that of the Creator is empowered by the Spirit of Christ and brings glory to him. What does not bring glory to him is a perversion of our creative abilities.

The hope for the world does not lie in science and technology, nor does it lie in the arts; the hope for the world is to be found in Christ *and* in a people animated by his Spirit.

And here I want to touch one more form of human creativity to which we are called. We are called to *be* God’s new creation. We ourselves are being formed afresh in the image of God through Christ. Enabled and empowered by the Spirit of God, we are each called to be creative in refashioning ourselves in the likeness of Christ. And we are called to be creative in our relationships with one another, forming one another afresh in the image of Christ. We are to become the model, the exhibit, of the new creation, a source of wonder even to the angels.

And here let me leave you with one closing thought. I promised to take you from Genesis 1 to Revelation 21. Revelation 21 is a wonderful chapter that describes God’s new creation at the end

of this age in terms of a beautiful city, the New Jerusalem, illuminated by the glory of the living God. In Revelation 21:24 we read:

The nations will walk by its light, and the kings of the earth will bring their splendour into it.

In this verse there is perhaps a hint that all that is best of human creativity, all that imitates God in being very good and bringing blessing, will somehow find a place in this new creation. Present human creativity will not be lost. All that is best of the arts and sciences of this present world will be brought into the new creation – and not just those produced by Christians, for I am convinced that the work of the Spirit is not confined to the present limits of God's people.

Perhaps there is even a hint that human creativity will not be brought to an end with the coming of Christ but rather will be renewed and will flourish as never before in the new creation. Only then, at last, will it be all and only what it was meant to be, a working with God for the good and blessing of his creation.

So now, our creativity is to be an anticipation of that day, empowered by the Spirit, bringing glory to Christ and blessing to the world that God has given into our care.

Be creative as God intended you to be.

Peter Misselbrook – 9th August 2015

Preached at the Celtic service at Christ Church Downend