

## REFLECTIONS ON “CREATIVITY”

INTROIT: “*Water from the Rock*”

David Stoddard/Steve Savides  
(from *A Sky Full of Stars*)  
The Still Speaking and Hilltop Players

*Out in this wilderness with nothing to drink,  
This deliverance is starting to stink.  
Hit a stone with a stick now, and what do you think?  
Water from the rock, amen!*

*Water from the rock, amen!  
Water from the rock, amen!  
Water from the rock, amen!  
Stick and stones are gonna save my bones.  
Water from the rock, amen!*

*We’ve seen some things out here would truly amaze:  
Bread from heaven and this bush was ablaze,  
And a promise for justice for the rest of our days!  
Water from the rock, amen!  
Water from the rock, amen!*

*Water from the rock, amen!  
Water from the rock, amen!  
Stick and stones are gonna save my bones.  
Water from the rock, amen!*

For the next three Sundays, we’re going to be mirroring back some words all of you used to describe this church in polling and conversations with our consultants, Rev. Mieke Vandersall and Rev. Dave Harder. As those conversations continue with all of you as active participants, we thought it might be helpful to reflect on some of those words that you used again and again. The word for this morning is *Creative*.

This church has a long tradition of creativity in our music program, whether led by Blondie Mesche, Mary Kay Easty or John Albrecht. Before I came to this church, Rev. John McFadden and Jone Riester wrote an annual musical for the youth to perform. And Andrea Tatlock, among others, linked this church with local artists including LU Art Scholars.

We thought it might be proper this morning to talk about creativity as we share some of the music from the intergenerational musicals we created in partnership with this church and our previous church in Watertown. I know you’ll want to welcome our Watertown friends and fearless cast members who have made the journey north to sing with us this morning.

The Introit for this morning was based on the familiar story from Exodus about the wilderness wanderings of the Hebrew people and how God rescued them from thirst and hunger. As we retold the story, we set it as a galactic journey and called it “*A Sky Filled with Stars*.”

Our journey in writing and directing our own musicals began, as all good stories do, with outright copyright violations. The first two shows we did were from the Chorister’s Guild: *Rescue in the Night* and *A Technicolor Promise*. We wrote extra scenes for them to offer a deeper exploration of

the underlying biblical text, give some dramatic heft and comic bits, and add some desperately needed female roles. It became clear that we needed to stop invading other people's work and do some of our own.

About that time, Dave Stoddard showed up in the church from the Wisconsin wasteland known as Beaver Dam. A very talented singer/songwriter, Dave began working with us to create hour-long, one act intergenerational musicals based on biblical stories.

This was not just a partnership between the three of us – it included all of our wonderful casts members who had questions and suggestions and, more than anything, were willing to tolerate our crazy rehearsal schedules and last-minute changes. It also included John Albrecht and the Children's Choir.

The first original show we wrote together was *Wherever You Go: The Story of Ruth.* At a tense moment in the story, those awaiting their fate turn to Psalm 139 for inspiration and comfort.

## CANTICLE

*"You're With Me Tonight"*

Stoddard/Savides (based on Psalm 139)  
(from *Wherever You Go: The Story of Ruth*)  
The Hilltop and Still Speaking Players

*Where can I go from your spirit?  
Nowhere.  
And where can I flee from your presence?  
Nowhere.  
If I climb to heaven,  
If I fall to earth,  
If I fly on the wings of the day,  
You are there, lord, shining bright!  
And so, my lord,  
I know you're with me tonight.*

*Can I hide from you, lord, in the ocean?  
Not there.  
Can I cover myself in the darkness?  
Nor there.  
In my mother's womb,  
In the darkest room,  
In the most secret place I can find  
I'll be found in your sight!  
And so, my lord,  
I know you're with me tonight.*

*Whenever I feel lonely,  
Whenever I'm afraid,  
I know that you are with me,  
Tonight and every day!*

*You were there in the joy of my birth,  
Caring!  
There in the tears of my grief,  
Sharing.  
In the daytime glow,  
In the night of the soul,  
From the rising to the setting of the light,  
And so, my lord,  
I know you're with me tonight.*

*Whenever I feel troubled,  
Whenever I'm confused,  
My fears you always settle,  
My doubts you don't refuse.*

*Where can I go from your spirit?  
Nowhere.  
And where can I flee from your presence?  
Nowhere.  
If I climb to heaven,  
If I fall to earth,  
If I fly on the wings of the day,  
You are there, lord, shining bright!  
And so, my lord,  
I know you're with me tonight.*

The great Greek philosopher Aristotle called Theology the “Queen of the Sciences” because he believed all the other sciences were devoted to exploring and understanding the Creator’s handiwork. In our Enlightened times, however, theology has been kicked out of the science classrooms and banished to the Liberal Arts wing along with Musicology, Creative Writing, and Philosophy. And I’m here to tell you that it’s a good thing.

One of the horrifying consequences of claiming theology as a science has been a rigid orthodoxy that approached Biblical texts as somehow infallible as they are literally applied.

We didn’t do that. When we entered a Biblical story we did it creatively, playfully, seeing how it might look like today and through the lens of our own experiences. For many of us, it’s hard to get over the training we had in other Christian traditions that the Bible was some kind of rule book and could only be understood by the religiously appointed referees. When Theology is an Art, a creative act, we become partners with one another in living out Jesus’ call to love and justice, co-creators in God’s work of stewardship and renewal, inheritors of a Still-Speaking Spirit that calls us to be a new creation.

That’s a lofty way of talking about our creative work with the shows we did, each of which at some point contained a poop joke.

Our show “*Lost and Found: A Patchwork of Parables*” was exactly what it sounds like: a patching together of Jesus’ parables: the Parable of the Prodigal Son, the Parable of the Sower, the Parable of the Talents, the Parable of the Pearl of Great Price, and more. The characters from the parables like Pearl and Gil Fatherson, Rocki Fields, Seedy, Onesy Talence, Winey, and Flower come

crashing together in their common search for a spiritual home. For the ending of the show, we borrowed a song Dave had previously written, “Everybody Wants to Go Home.”

## MUSICAL REFLECTION

“Everybody Wants to Go Home”

David Stoddard

(additional verse by Steve Savides, from *Lost and Found: A Patchwork of Parables*)

The Still Speaking and Hilltop Players

*Home is where the heart is,  
Where they have to let you in,  
Like some heaven, always open  
No matter what the sin.  
Something sentimental  
Always brings you back,  
Like some memories you remember,  
Like some scene from the past.*

*Everybody wants to go home,  
And I say  
I'm on my way...  
Everybody wants to go home,  
And I say  
I'm on my way...  
I'm on my way.*

*Home is where you're treasured  
Like some gold found in a field.  
Where your happiness is precious,  
Where your hurts are always healed.  
Your place is at the table,  
Your name is on the door.  
Step up from where you've fallen  
To where you are adored.*

*Everybody wants to go home,  
And I say  
I'm on my way...  
Everybody wants to go home,  
And I say  
I'm on my way...  
I'm on my way.*

*“After the seas are all cross'd, (as they seem already cross'd,)  
After the great captains and engineers have accomplish'd their work,  
After the noble inventors, after the scientists, the chemist, the geologist, ethnologist,  
Finally shall come the poet worthy of that name,  
The true son of God shall come singing his songs.”*

That's by the great American poet, Walt Whitman, in his “Passage to India” from *Leaves of Grass*. Let him serve as an inspiration for all of us this morning to take up the art of Theology, to be

disciples who sing the songs of God, calling us all into the realm of possibility with something new and hopeful, with a future.

Based on Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians, our show *Family Camp* showed three generations returning every summer to Camp Corinth to renew, refresh, and redeem the kinds of experiences – death, divorce, division – that happen to every family. All along, the camp counselor has unsuccessfully tried to get the campers to sing the old favorite, "Kum Ba Yah." At the end of the show, she finally succeeds, and, as the families dedicate a memorial on the camp's grounds, they add their own version of the Apostle Paul's familiar words on love.

## SONG OF RESPONSE

*"Love Like Light"*

Stoddard/Savides (from *Family Camp*)  
The Hilltop and Still Speaking Players

*Kum ba yah, my lord, Kum ba yah...  
Kum ba yah, my lord, Kum ba yah...  
Kum ba yah, my lord, Kum ba yah...  
O Lord, Kum ba yah.*

*Love like light,  
Be a beacon on a hill,  
Be a city for all the world to see,  
'Cause there is no one that is alone  
When there is a light that they can see.*

*Love like light,  
Chase the dark away,  
And love will show you everything you need,  
'Cause there is no one that is alone  
When there is a light that they can see.*

*Love is blind, you say that when you're young.  
Bears all things, no matter what the cost.  
It's timeless and it's endless, above all and beyond.  
Keep your eye upon it, and you'll never be lost.*

*Love like light,  
For those who are alone  
Be a candle for all the world to see,  
'Cause there is no one what is alone  
When there is a light that they can see.*

*Love is kind, it stills an angry tongue.  
Perseveres and hopes for everyone.  
I might have power enough to make a mountain fall,  
But if I have no love...  
Then I am nothing at all.*

*Kum ba yah, my lord...  
Love like light,  
'Cause heaven knows the need  
For a candle that all the world can see,*

*'Cause there is no one that is alone  
When there is a light that they can see.*

Other shows we wrote that we are not performing songs from this morning are:

*Entertaining Angels*, our musical version of the story of Sodom and Gomorrah – sounds like a laugh-a-minute, doesn't it?

*Fish Fry: The Musical*, a show written for the Appleton church that featured Jesus as a head chef, the disciples as the kitchen staff, and an evil Canadian food magnate trying to crush them all and steal the secret fish sauce that was feeding so many people.

*The Pirates of Samaria*, another Appleton-only show, featured the Good Samaritan as a collective - a wild and crazy crew of pirates.

*Miracle Road*, a Wizard of Oz story structure that, one-by-one, gathers those who have been healed by Jesus joining together to find him and thank him. They arrive too late - he's been Crucified – but they recognize him risen in one another on the road.

*Opening Acts*, did just that through a musical version of the Book of Acts with particular focus on the Apostle Paul and the commission to extend the Gospel to those who had been excluded.

The last show we wrote together for this church was a parable for our times. The thoroughly ordinary town of Bathwater, Wisconsin was facing (or, rather, was refusing to face) an impending ecological disaster. *Bathwater* was based on John the Seer's letter in Revelations to the church at Laodicea – "*You are neither cold nor hot!*" We were two weeks from opening when we were shut down by the Pandemic. Consider it an unperformed masterpiece.

Finally, there is a show we wrote in Watertown that nearly became a disaster. We never did it here in Appleton. It was two acts and two hours long (so thank God for small favors). The show was called *Elijah Chair* and was a musical version of King Ahab and Queen Jezebel's struggle with the prophet Elijah. In this song, the prophet shares his vision.

#### MUSICAL REFLECTION

*"Still, Small Voice"*

David Stoddard, singer/songwriter  
(from *Elijah Chair*)

*There was a hurricane  
And a firestorm;  
It was terrible and awesome to behold.  
Then an earthquake,  
Then the mountain fell,  
Then a silence that was greater than them all -  
And God was in that still, small voice.*

*There was a nation strong  
As a firestorm -  
It was terrible and awesome to behold.  
There was the sound of bombs,  
Then the city fell,*

*Then a silence that was greater than them all  
And God was in that still small voice.*

*When my heart is low and my eyes cast down  
And I am occupied by simpler things,  
Come to me and make me yours  
So I can be that still, small voice.*

*There was a child born in an alleyway  
It was terrible and awesome to behold.  
There were city sounds,  
Then the snow fell -  
It was a whisper that was greater than them all  
And God was in that still small voice.*

*When my heart is low and my eyes cast down  
And I am occupied by simpler things,  
Come to me and make me yours  
So I can be that still, small voice...  
So I can be that still, small voice.*

The Creator God invites us to co-create a new hope and a new future. For this we have been blessed by God, called by Jesus Christ, and equipped by the Holy Spirit. Go in peace to love and serve with faithfulness, joy, and creativity. Amen.

Our Benediction Response this morning comes this song from our musical, *The Prophets of Loss*. After being delivered from the Fiery Furnace which, in our version, was a deadly game show, the survivors sing of their hope.

#### BENEDICTION RESPONSE

*“Spirit of the Lord/Walking Up to Zion”*

Stoddard/Savides  
(from *The Prophets of Loss*)  
The Still Speaking and Hilltop Players

*The spirit of the Lord is upon me...  
The spirit of the Lord is upon me...  
The spirit of the Lord is upon me*

*And I’m bringing news of joy!  
The spirit of the Lord is upon me...  
The spirit of the Lord is upon me...  
The spirit of the Lord is upon me  
‘Cause the way is open now!*

*Let the captives throw down their chains,  
Let the humble hear the refrain,  
Let the brokenhearted rise up again:  
Good news!*

*Walking up to Zion –  
We’re finally on our way –  
Walking up to find ourselves*

*A brand new day!  
Walking up to Zion –  
Bid Babylon goodbye  
'Cuz we'll see that holy city  
Bye and bye.*

*Walking up to Zion  
In everybody's sight –  
The other nations need  
A guiding light!  
Walking up to Zion  
Won't it be a shock to them  
When the lord restores the old  
Jerusalem?*

*Walking up, walking up,  
Walking up, walking up,  
Walking up, walking up,  
Walking up, walking up –*

*Walking up to Zion...  
Our hopes are coming true!  
God is making everybody new!  
Walking up to Zion –  
I think we're almost there  
For the spirit of the lord is upon me,  
The spirit of the lord is upon me,  
The spirit of the lord is upon me.  
I can feel that holy spirit –  
Feel that holy spirit –  
Feel that holy spirit in the air!*

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Sermon preached by Reverend Dr. Stephen Savides at First Congregational United Church of Christ, Appleton, Wisconsin  
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