Art as Spiritual Practice

We live in a time when our capacity for imagining is thwarted by technology that encourages us to tune out and engage in habitual patterns. We have become passive consumers of corporate interests rather than active imaginers of our own vision deeply contained within our values. Cultivating art as a spiritual practice is a way of freeing our imaginations and developing valuable skills for vital living in the world.

This weekend in addition to verbal expression of ideas we will work to create a safe space for creative expression as we explore and play with paint, pencils, collage, poetry, movement, in addition to words! Making art is akin to meditation or prayer, as God can be found in the playful and experimental, and uncanny places of our lives. When we engage in any artistic expression, we are co-creating with God! As creative beings we impart a profound dignity to ourselves and our work in the world!

Jesus used the parable as a means of creatively conveying his message. In doing so he saw deeply into situations and people and crafted words and stories to reveal spirit in a way that was uniquely effective. Art can help us to explore the layers of meaning we derive from his message and make it our own, beyond words.

The practice of art-making or living artistically requires spaciousness and time and it can help us to slow down. Art happens not just in those moments when we are painting or drawing but can happens when we approach our activities with an artistic spirit. Engaging in art and the artistic way of life helps us to be present to the moment and see deeply. By making art a spiritual practice we can discipline ourselves to make time for our relationship with God through the conscious act of creating and can discover divine presence there. We slowly learn to surrender to a process greater than ourselves and loosen our tight grip of control.

Allow yourself to let go of judgment about what makes for good or bad art, letting your own creative process unfold, surrendering to how the Spirit is moving through you, guiding you and the art itself. A remarkable freedom can emerge. How would your life be different if you could embody your inner artist?

Art-making can encourage curiosity and wonder and respects the deeper mystery at work within. Rather than linear explanations of how things work, art illustrates the complexities, paradoxes and ambiguities of living. It invites us to rely more on intuition than on logic.

Art-making can be playful, encouraging a sense of wonder and joy and improvisation. Have you ever been involved in a project and lost track of time? The experience of being fully present has been described as being in “the flow” or altered state of awareness where our sense of time changes from chronos to kairos time. We become lost and absorbed and yet fully present to what we are doing. We are caught up in the experience! In the process of art-making we can become a loving and witnessing presence to what is stirring and unfolding in us. Art becomes a vehicle of discovery.
We are bound to experience some deep feelings this weekend and art can be a safe container for voicing our feelings and experiences without so many words. We will have the freedom to reclaim our deepest knowing giving it voice and truth. Art gives us a chance to give meaningful expression to our dreams, values, and images. Perhaps you will have a dream this weekend which you would like to sketch! Where else can your inspiration come from?

Art-making can be a relational and communal endeavor. Whatever we create is ultimately in service of the larger community and contributes to the collective un. In this way, art-making has the potential to be prophetic when it calls us to new ways of seeing and depicting the world. We are invited to look more deeply at the world and see it with our own unique vision. On the last day of our seminar we will have a chance to share any art we would like with others. What will our collective unconscious reveal about our group?

In a world where so much value is placed on productivity, the art materials invite you to make time for that which is "useless" by cultural standards. Create art for the sheer pleasure of it. Make beauty present in the world. Free yourself from expectations and goals and encounter a God who is present in the dynamic act of creating.

What if our churches were places committed to nurturing creativity rather than holding so tightly to the way things have always been done? How can you make space this weekend for the delights of creating?

_There may be a great fire in our soul, yet no one ever comes to warm himself at it, and the passers-by see only a wisp of smoke._

— Vincent van Gogh

_At present I absolutely want to paint a starry sky. It often seems to me that night is still more richly coloured than the day; having hues of the most intense violets, blues and greens. If only you pay attention to it you will see that certain stars are lemon-yellow, others pink or a green, blue and forget-me-not brilliance. And without my expatiating on this theme it is obvious that putting little white dots on the blue-black is not enough to paint a starry sky._

— Vincent van Gogh

_If you hear a voice within you say you cannot paint, then by all means paint and that voice will be silenced._...

— Vincent Willem van Gogh

_In spite of everything, I shall rise again; I will take up my pencil, which I have forsaken in my great discouragement, and I will go on with my drawing._

_I dream my paintings, then I paint my dreams._ (Vincent van Gogh)