

## Via Creativa 2021: Rooted and Grounded

“From the apparent dormancy of the winter months, we are called to explore the imagination and creativity that underlie all of creation at every moment.”

We survived 2020. We made it through the COVID holidays. We’ve begun a new year. We know turning over the calendar will not magically change the difficulties of 2020. COVID cases and deaths are rising. Our country and our faith community remain in tumultuous transitions. But maybe we are starting this year with some fresh insights from the past year. As we take a deep breath and start anew, let’s reflect on what keeps us Rooted and Grounded. When trees lose all their leaves and appear to be dead, what is happening underground? Let’s go back to the basics of faith. When we pare down to what keeps us (more or less) sane, what do we find? Can we return to Beginner’s Mind, open to whatever this new year may bring?

### January 10 – Rooted and Grounded in Creation

*The heavens are telling the glory of God;  
and the firmament proclaims God’s handiwork.  
Day to day pours forth speech,  
and night to night declares knowledge.  
There is no speech, nor are there words;  
their voice is not heard;  
yet their voice goes out through all the earth,  
and their words to the end of the world.  
~ Psalm 19:1-4*

The Hebrew Scriptures begin with two different Creation stories. In Genesis One we get the poetic imagery of the Spirit hovering over the chaos and bringing forth life with a word. The poem ends with the creation of humanity, male and female, in the image of the gods (yes, it’s plural there, a team). In Genesis Two we get the tale of the Garden of Eden – where God creates an “earth creature” (the Hebrew word for this is *adam*) and the creature is called to name all the other creatures and receives a life-partner (*eve* is the Latin version of the Hebrew word – *chayah* - for “living”) who is neither above nor below him, but from his side and by his side.

Scriptures begin with creation. This is true not only in the Judeo-Christian traditions, but in most religions. Creation stories abound. Jubilee! is Rooted and Grounded in Creation Spirituality, so where else would we turn to go back to basics? Creation Spirituality asserts, with Genesis One, that we are not born in original sin, but in original blessing. Genesis One begins, “In the beginning when God created<sup>[a]</sup> the heavens and the earth ...” and ends, “God saw everything that God had made, and indeed, it was very good.”

This is the first and great truth. That all of creation is very good. And we are part of that creation. What if we believed this with all of our hearts? That we are very good. Each of us and all of us. And that our goodness is intimately connected to the goodness of the creation in which we live? If we are already very good, does that change our approach to

our New Year's self-improvement projects? Does it change how we view other people? If we listen to the whisperings of creation itself, from mycelium to Mount Mitchell, from hummingbirds to hippos, can we hear their messages of resilience and joy?

### **January 17 – Rooted and Grounded in Justice**

*You have heard that it was said, 'An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.' But I say to you, Do not resist an evildoer. But if anyone strikes you on the right cheek, turn the other also; and if anyone wants to sue you and take your coat, give your cloak as well; and if anyone forces you to go one mile, go also the second mile. Give to everyone who begs from you, and do not refuse anyone who wants to borrow from you. You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be children of your Creator; for God makes the sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the righteous and on the unrighteous. For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? And if you greet only your brothers and sisters, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same? Be perfect, therefore, as your Creator is perfect. ~  
Matthew 5:38-48*

Dr. Cornel West has famously said, “Justice is what love looks like in public.” It’s a good reminder that love, which can sound soft, and justice, which can sound tough, are actually two sides of one coin. The racial reckoning that erupted during the pandemic requires us to pay with the whole coin.

Some people like to read Dr. King’s “I have a dream” speech on the holiday we set aside for him. I prefer his “Letter from a Birmingham Jail” and read it at least once each year. In it he reminds us, “We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly.” And that, “Human progress never rolls in on wheels of inevitability; it comes through the tireless efforts of men willing to be coworkers with God, and without this hard work, time itself becomes an ally of the forces of social stagnation. We must use time creatively, in the knowledge that the time is always ripe to do right. Now is the time to make real the promise of democracy and transform our pending national elegy into a creative psalm of brotherhood. Now is the time to lift our national policy from the quicksand of racial injustice to the solid rock of human dignity.”

Now is the time, he said 58 years ago. Justice delayed is justice denied and yet we delay and delay and delay. What would it look like to be rooted and grounded in justice? If the Via Creativa is a call “to explore the imagination and creativity that underlie all of creation at every moment” how do we engage our imaginations and creativity in the call for justice?

Does justice dance? Does it sing? Does it paint a new picture of the future? Tell a compelling story of our past? Maybe love and justice aren’t two sides of a cold, hard coin so much as two arms reaching out from one heart. Two legs hiking together up the

summit of joy. Two ears listening for truth. Two eyes gazing at creation. Two bodies entangled in passionate union.

*“We must use time creatively, in the knowledge that the time is always ripe to do right.”*

### **January 24 – Rooted and Grounded in Presence**

*You are the salt of the earth; but if salt has lost its taste, how can its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything, but is thrown out and trampled under foot.*

*You are the light of the world. A city built on a hill cannot be hidden. No one after lighting a lamp puts it under the bushel basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all in the house. ~Matthew 5:13-15*

*Instructions for living a life:*

*Pay attention.*

*Be astonished.*

*Tell about it.*

*~Mary Oliver*

If you like salty snacks or have a salty attitude or drink a salty dog, you expect some flavor, some bite. Salty is not bland. So when Jesus tells us we're the salt of the earth, he doesn't expect dull. Someone full of the spirit brings the zest! Spirit people shine when they show up. They light up the room without putting on the extra-shiny face in the morning or dancing in the lamp-shade at the party. It's the zest and shine of being fully present – right here, right now. It's the shine of being seen. When we're present to the moment, we're present to God in the moment. When we're present to God in the moment, we're present to God in each other. And, wowza, how that lights us up!

### **January 31 – Rooted and Grounded in Intuition (Imbolc/Candlemas)**

*“Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; the one who seeks finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened...” ~ Matthew 7:7-8*

*“The soul is always wiser than the mind, even though we are dependent on the mind to read the soul for us.” ~ John O'Donahue*

It may be a slight conflict of interest for a fortune cookie to advise “Trust your gut,” but it's also a heckuva wise suggestion. Decisions I regret result from ignoring the gut's red alert or happy yes, and over-analysis set in. My best decisions emerge from that knowingness in the bones, not the reactive brain. Often, my response is- “What the heck?” Intuition begs leaps of faith, knocks on doors you'd never think would open, asking for the impossible. While it seems impossible that here, in the depth of winter, that Spring is already happening. Earth is wiser than our skittering attention span and is already preparing for bursting forth! Seeds are waking up beneath the frost, and mother's milk begins to churn in the creatures of the fields. We humans are still creatures of the fields and are subject to the pull and push of forces yet unknown to

science. Ancients knew the gut had a wisdom all its own- today, science has only just cracked that fortune cookie. We may have much to learn- but much more to trust.

## **February 7 – Rooted and Grounded in Faith**

*Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? Look at the birds of the air; they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Maker feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? And can any of you by worrying add a single hour to your span of life? And why do you worry about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they neither toil nor spin, yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not clothed like one of these. But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will God not much more clothe you—you of little faith? Therefore do not worry, saying, “What will we eat?” or “What will we drink?” or “What will we wear?” For it is the Gentiles who strive for all these things; and indeed your Creator knows that you need all these things. But strive first for the kingdom of God and God’s righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. So do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will bring worries of its own. Today’s trouble is enough for today. ~ Matthew 6:25-34*

### *CHANGING THIS TO RAMAYANA*

*When Rama asks Hanuman, “How do you look upon me?” the great monkey god gives a three-part answer, “When I believe I am the body, then I am your faithful servant. When I know I am the soul, I know myself to be a spark of your eternal Light. And when I have the vision of truth, you and I, my Lord, are one and the same.”*

Derick Lugo, one of the few Black thru-hikers to have completed the Appalachian trail tells this story in his book, “The Unlikely Thru-Hiker”: Alongside the AT, Ann who runs a hiker feed, handed thru-hikers a bag of marbles for us to choose one that called to us. I joked about the extra weight that it was going to add. She shared her thoughts about our

journey. “The marble is a reminder that, at any moment, something wonderful can show up in your life. Whether it be a hiker feed, a cooler full of sodas, a much-needed ride to town, a lovely sunset, a profound conversation, or someone letting you use their shower. Mini-miracles, magic, and unexpected gifts will come to you at the exact moment you need them. Let the marble help you remember that moment and put energy into the marble every time magic happens. Then, on the days that are hard, pull out the marble and remember: around the bend something is waiting for you. Have faith, soak up the energy you put in the marble, and move on.”

We don't have to be AT hikers to get a marble and start noticing the magic! Or as George Michael sang, “I gotta have faith-a-faith-a-faith!”

### **February 14 – Rooted and Grounded in Love**

*God is love, and those who abide in love abide in God, and God abides in them. There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear; for fear has to do with punishment, and whoever fears has not reached perfection in love. We love because God first loved us. Those who say, ‘I love God’, and hate their brothers or sisters, are liars; for those who do not love a brother or sister whom they have seen, cannot love God whom they have not seen. The commandment we have from God is this: those who love God must love their brothers and sisters also. ~ 1 John 4:16, 18-21*

Love is in the air! It makes the world go round! It's blind! Lionel Richie has endless love and Beyonce is crazy in love. Foreigner wants to know what love is, Elvis Costello wonders what's so funny about peace, love and understand, and Elvis Presley can't help falling in love. Most of our lives we are searching for love - a person to love, a job to love, a food to love, a home to love, even a God to love. So much of what we choose to love can't love us back and disappointment sets in.

“When infants aren't held, they can become sick, even die. It's universally accepted that children need love, but at what age are people supposed to stop needing it? We never do. We need love in order to live happily, as much as we need oxygen in order to live at all,” writes Marianne Williamson in *A Return to Love*. MLK decided to stick with love because “hate is too great a burden to bear.”

What is this oxygen we need and how do we stick with it? Maybe we can become the community that Fleetwood Mac sings about: “You make loving fun!”

### **February 21 – Rooted and Grounded in Humility**

*And whenever you fast, do not look dismal, like the hypocrites, for they disfigure their faces so as to show others that they are fasting. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward. But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, so that your fasting may be seen not by others but by your God who is in secret; and your Creator who sees in secret will reward you. Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust consume and where thieves break in and steal; but store up for*

*yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust consumes and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. ~ Matthew 6:16-21*

It's the 1st Sunday of Lent - have you given anything up yet? Maybe not sugar, but how about envy? Or gossip? Or a sense of entitlement? Have you ever tried the no complaining challenge? You put a bracelet on either wrist and begin 21 days of no complaining. If you complain, you move the bracelet to the other wrist and start the 21 days over. It takes most people 4 to 5 months to complete the 21-day challenge.

Lent is not really about giving things up - though 40 days is a good length of time for a new habit or to create some discipline in our lives. Lent is a time of getting humble (so maybe a challenge for the 40 days will help keep us humble). Humility is not thinking less of yourself, it's thinking about yourself less. Parker Palmer, in his book *Let Your Life Speak*, says, "The spiritual life is full of paradoxes. One of them is that the humiliation that brings us down - down to ground on which it is safe to stand and to fall - eventually takes us to a firmer and fuller sense of self."

What if humility does not intend for us to become doormats, but doorways to our whole, real, true selves - warts and all - where we find our genuine strengths and the courage to use them?

## **February 28 – Rooted and Grounded in Grace**

*Do not judge, so that you may not be judged. For with the judgement you make you will be judged, and the measure you give will be the measure you get. Why do you see the speck in your neighbor's eye, but do not notice the log in your own eye? Or how can you say to your neighbor, "Let me take the speck out of your eye", while the log is in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your neighbor's eye. ~Matthew 7:1-5*

"Grace is something you can never get but can only be given. There's no way to earn it or deserve it or bring about anymore than you can deserve the taste of raspberries and cream or earn good looks." – Frederick Buechner

At a particularly low point in my life, I felt I had fallen out of grace with everyone and everything important to me. Then, in an instant, my pain broke open to a mystical moment where it became clear to me in a visceral way - not just the intellectual way I thought I already believed - that it is impossible to fall out of God's grace. In fact, it is only by falling that we land in God's grace. We cannot steer ourselves there, climb the hill to it, create the circumstances for it (at least, consciously) or arrive at it through prayerful effort. We collapse into it, usually quite by mistake. It is the ground that comes up to meet us on our downward stumble. And lying there, pressed against the earth, we find that the view is surprisingly lovely. Then we may even wonder why we were trying so hard to stay upright in the first place.

"I do not understand the mystery of grace -- only that it meets us where we are and does not leave us where it found us." - Anne Lamott

### **March 7 – Rooted and Grounded in Prayer**

*'When you are praying, do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do; for they think that they will be heard because of their many words. Do not be like them, for God knows what you need before you ask.'*

*'Pray then in this way:  
Our Father in heaven,  
hallowed be your name.  
Your kingdom come.  
Your will be done,  
on earth as it is in heaven.  
Give us this day our daily bread.  
And forgive us our debts,  
as we also have forgiven our debtors.  
And do not bring us to the time of trial,  
but rescue us from the evil one.'*

*For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you; but if you do not forgive others, neither will God forgive your trespasses. ~  
Matthew 6:7-15*

In her poem, "The Summer Day," Mary Oliver wrote "I don't know exactly what a prayer is. I do know how to pay attention." In a book title, Anne Lamott identified "Help, Thanks and Wow" as the "three essential prayers." These wise women express some beautiful truths about prayer.

Prayer is not only bowing your head, getting on your knees, and folding your hands. It also can be as many ways as there are people in the world. Jubilee affirms that we pray with our whole being - dancing, singing, creating, eating, loving and love making, and crying are all examples of the endless ways we pray. Whether we pray in a mosque, a forest, a temple, a synagogue, a quiet room, a dance floor, around a fire, or in a circle around a round altar . . . lifting up our needs, praise, gratitude and all the murmurings of our heart, we are also grounding on the earth. We bow to the earth in supplication, but also in praise and humility and awe. We walk and dance on the earth with heavy hearts and also with delight. Prayer comes from the ground up.

~ Anne Wray

### **March 14 – Rooted and Grounded in Community**

*... Give our leaders your justice, O God ... For our leader delivers the needy when they call, the poor and those who have no helper, and has pity on the weak and the needy, and saves the lives of the needy. ... ~ Psalm 72*

*... When Jesus saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. ... ~ Matthew 9:35-38.*

*For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. For in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and we were all made to drink of one Spirit. ... If one member suffers, all suffer together with it; if one member is honored, all rejoice together with it. Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it. ~ 1 Corinthians 12:12-27*

The great thing about the image of the Body from Corinthians is that every body part counts. Yes, even the buttocks. When they suffer, we all suffer. You know it's true. Whether it's the body of Christ or the Body Politic or the body of our Jubilee community, we're all in it together. There's no escaping. Sometimes a really cranky part does get excised (we're looking at you, gallbladder and appendix) when it gets so toxic it poisons the rest of the system. But usually, we treat the hurting parts with extra care and attention. We know we need each other. All it takes is a paper cut on our little finger to remind us that even small wounds on small parts impact the whole body. Where is there a little bit of suffering that you can offer a bandaid? And how do we feed the whole body so that our entire immune system can function well? Neither our personal bodies nor our corporate bodies can thrive if we're only taking in junk. What does it look like to create a healthy system so that paper cuts don't become festering wounds? What does it look like in our faith community, our neighborhoods, our nation, our world, our eco-system? Maybe we need some permaculture for the soul!