

Creation Centred Spirituality

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Today is the third Sunday in our Creation Series and we are asked to reflect on the Wilderness experience.

In the early 1980's a the Dominican Priest Matthew Fox wrote a book entitled 'Original Blessing' in which he outlined a spiritual pathway which is known as 'Creation Centered Spirituality'.

Matthew Fox drew deeply on the teachings of the early mystics and from the earliest biblical traditions in which creation is blessed by God rather than cursed...

In the Creation Centered model Fox speaks about four pathways that we follow in the unfolding of our spiritual journey and each of these may be working concurrently in our experience albeit it at different intensities and levels.

The first pathway is called the Via Positiva.

In the Via Positiva we are moved in our spirit into an experience of the sacred.

This may be at the sight of a beautiful sunrise or sunset; it may from the fragrance of a flower or the intensity of its colour or the intricacy of its design.

We might be moved at the wonder of birth or even the complexity of a human body.

Fox suggests that rather than having 'saints days' we should have 'organ days' where we marvel at the working of an eyeball or a liver or even a simple cell and how it replicates to make a human body...

Or it may be the sound of music or some poignant words of poetry or prose...

In the Via Positiva we are moved by wonder and in that wonder we catch a taste of the divine...

...this is the first step in the spiritual pathway.

Pause

The second pathway is the Via Negativa.

In this pathway we are called to embrace the darkness in all its guises; to face our own shortcomings our demons if you will and those of the world...

The Via Negative calls us to embrace those things which we deny or bury in our lives. It might be our sexuality, our sense of loneliness or accumulated grief.

I was once talking with a priest here in the diocese of Auckland who after a particularly torrid time went for a month's retreat in Australia. His retreat director told him simply to go and sit on the hills that overlooked the sea – to take no books or radio, but just to sit.

For the first few days he was frustrated and felt he was simply wasting his time but then slowly as the layers peeled away he found tears welling up and soon he was sobbing uncontrollably. They were tears of accumulated grief from the many moves he had made as priest from parish to parish over the years and all the losses that went with those moves. Certainly an personal engagement of the darkness in our lives.

The Via Negativa is embracing uncertainty, embracing not knowing and embracing pain and suffering in a way that again we experience the sacred and the divine...

This poem I think sums up the Via Negativity beautifully:

'And the old voice kept insisting
Make up your mind...
Now
Refuse to suffer uncertainty,
Indecision is weakness
Not knowing is a dumb game.

But the new voice whispered –
Wait.
Stay in the darkness,
It will enclose you as velvet.

Embrace the pain
For it is necessary for new birth.
And do not reject
'Not knowing',
For to stand humbly with uncertainty
Is both trust and wisdom.

The answer will come
In its own time.....not yours'

Grace Blindell – Via Negativa

The wilderness experience belongs squarely in the Via Negativa. It is that place where we are metaphorically 'tempted by Satan' and where we dwell 'with the wild beasts' both in our world, in our society and in ourselves.

It is that place where in Paul's words 'the whole creation groans in labour pains...and not only creation but we ourselves...'

Pause

The Third Pathway is the Via Creativa and emanates directly from the Via Negativa.

It is the pathway of creativity where we find new ways of looking at things – we see with fresh eyes – or we experience a healing or a catharsis, or we find a new way of expressing ourselves in art or words or music...

There is an organisation called SPARK. It is a secular organisation but does an intensely spiritual work.

Spark works with a variety of people with disabilities – they may be stroke victims, amputees, people with intellectual or psychological disabilities, and more recently with people who have no visible disability at all, and uses art as a way to enable them to express their creative potential.

Out of the darkness new hope and creativity is found.

Elizabeth Kubler-Ross, the famous pioneer into the process of death and dying found that many people who had a terminal illness, once they had embraced

their dying (embraced the Via Negativa) found an incredible ability for creative thought and expression.

They often wrote wonderful stories and beautiful poems and their whole demeanour changed...

Pause

And the final pathway is the Via Transformativa.

Again this grows out of the Via Creativa and is quite literally the way of transformation.

In ourselves we are transformed into a new person - and we seek ways of transforming structures in our society and in our world to bring justice and peace and equity.

As I said these four pathways often run concurrently in our lives, but at any time one may be more dominant than another.

The spiritual life is a journey and spending time in the wilderness – or the Via Negativa – is an essential part of that journey.

Jesus spent forty days in the wilderness and from that experience embarked on his ministry of love and compassion.

And Paul reminds us that when we are those wilderness places, God has not abandoned us but often it is the Spirit of God that intercedes with us ‘...with sighs too deep for words...’

...and remember:

Stay in the darkness,
It will enclose you as velvet.
Embrace the pain
For it is necessary for new birth.
And do not reject
‘Not knowing’,
For to stand humbly with uncertainty
Is both trust and wisdom.

