

## Getting to Know our Commissioned Artwork Laura Hensley

Good morning! Today I want to say a few words to help us enter into the experience of getting to know the new artwork created for our sanctuary. As a practicing artist, myself, and a former HS Art Teacher of 16 years, I deeply believe in the power of art, and its crucial responsibility in our society, and the role it can play in our lives. Art is often the catalyst for gaining better understanding about something, questioning societal norms, calling out the current political climate, celebrating our culture and history, coming to terms with historical events or traumas, and notably, amplifying voices and experiences in incredibly profound and transformative ways. I believe from my very core in the power of art, and that the job of an artwork is so much more than to simply *decorate* a space. And so, this artwork that our church has commissioned with so much thought, care and intention, is not just to decorate our worship space, but to help us worship more deeply through contemplation, and wonder.

When we encounter an artwork, there is no single “right way” to look at it. Instead, we bring our eyes, our memories, our taste and experiences, and our faith into conversation with what we see. And sometimes, especially when the style is more abstract than we’re used to, the invitation is simply, to: **slow down, look longer, and stay curious**. See, I am biased about this and can get pretty dorky about abstract art, because non-objective art can capture the ethereal and more mysterious parts of our lived experience and spiritual existence - places that representational imagery cannot possibly reach! In many ways, appreciating art parallels our practices of worship, prayer, and meditation. We pause. We breathe. We open ourselves to what God may reveal—sometimes clearly, sometimes slowly, sometimes in ways we don’t expect. Abstract art asks us to explore color, shape, movement, and space the way we might explore Scripture or prayer: returning again and again, discovering something new each time, and allowing the Spirit to meet us in the quiet work of seeing.

I know many of us have deep love for this church and its familiar beauty. Change in a beloved space can feel unsettling, and who needs that when so many things about the world right now feel unsettling? But I want to encourage us to approach this mural the way we approach prayer—with openness, trust, and expectation that God may speak in ways we don’t yet anticipate.

The artist, Lisa Bierer, shared that she painted this work with the Holy Spirit as her muse. She prayed through Scripture as she worked: the praise of creation in *Psalms 148*, the mysterious Spirit hovering over the waters in *Genesis 1*, the cosmic beginning of *John 1*, and the breath of God forming the starry host in *Psalms 33*. These passages shaped the movement and energy of the painting.

Lisa began each panel by studying aerial photographs of real damage to our earth—air pollution, melting ice, loss of ground cover, wildfires, and shifting winds. She described these images as having a “terrible beauty,” stirring her both to grief and to love for creation. She painted over these patterns of destruction with images of *original creation*,

allowing hope to rise over brokenness. Her belief is that through prayer, our own choices, and the resilience built into creation itself, **healing is possible**.

As you look at the mural, you'll see this journey: chaos and the Spirit's hovering presence, order emerging from disorder, life blooming out of swirling color and movement. And finally, that last panel—left more open—asks us to contemplate our future, God's future for us, and our responsibility for the world entrusted to us.

Before I close, I want to offer a heartfelt thank-you to Katherine, Scott, and the entire committee who shepherded this commission with so much care, thought, time, and passion. Their collaboration with Lisa has been prayerful, intentional, and full of love for St. David's. Let their dedication remind us that this artwork is not an interruption to our worship life, but a gift—created with deep faith and discernment—to enrich it. May their example encourage all of us to remain open-minded, appreciative, and curious as we welcome this mural into our shared spiritual home.

My hope for our congregation, and anyone who visits St. David's, is that this artwork becomes a companion in our worship—a visual reminder of God's creative power, God's healing desire, the gifts God gives us, and the beauty that can emerge from chaos. I invite you to spend time with it. Let it speak. Let it surprise you. And let it call us, together, into hope.