

The Road Less Traveled – January 12, 2017

I had some folks in my office the other day, and one of them noticed the painting on my wall. Actually he noticed the signature on the bottom – Trigg – and he asked me if I had painted the portrait. I laughed and told him, no. It was painted by my grandmother, and it is one of my most valued possessions. It is a portrait of Jesus, at least my grandmother's vision of how Jesus would look. She painted it many years ago and, not long before her death, she gave it to me. As a passionate landscape artist, it was the only portrait she ever painted.

My grandmother was an artist. She painted for as long as I can remember, and years ago, she had her own studio and taught hundreds of other people to paint. She used to say that inside every person was an artist and insisted that she could teach anyone to paint. After she gave me an art kit and a series of lessons for my 12th birthday, I think she stopped saying that.

Because the truth is, I am no artist. It's not just that I can't paint or draw or sculpt – and I definitely can't – it's that I do not have the vision. When an artist creates, he or she does so driven largely by how their creation will affect other people. Will it move someone? How will it make them feel? Of what will it remind them? When I draw or paint, I spend my time worrying about whether it looks like what I want it to look like and if I have the colors mixed right. It's the difference between someone who creates from a blank canvass and someone who simply puts together a model with a series of instructions and a color chart.

I couldn't help but think of my grandmother as I spent time in my morning devotional the other day. I was directed to words from the Old Testament book of Isaiah. "But be glad and rejoice forever in what I am creating; for I am about to create Jerusalem as a joy, and its people as a delight." (Isaiah 65:18-19) And I thought about my grandmother when I read those words because God is not simply reminding the Israelites that they are the product of God's hand, but that they are literally a creation of God. And like an artist putting a brush to a blank canvas, God has a vision for what God's creation will be. Jerusalem and its people will be a joy, a delight, a blessing in the midst of God's creation. They are not simply created to be God's possessions, but rather to elicit a response from every person they encounter.

Which begs the question: For what were each of us created? For what purpose does our church exist? Just like the Israelites, we, too, are God's creation, and like a piece of fine art, we are created to elicit a response from the world. Put another way, when people step back and examine us closely, what do they see?

See you Sunday.