

KNOWING & DOING

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Following Christ by Creating

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“What would you do if money were no object and you could not fail?”

The first time I heard this question was during a private session with Dr. Art Lindsley, exploring the topic of “calling” near the end of my Fellows Year One Program in 2007. I did not expect this question. Although I took it very seriously, I responded immediately, “I would make pictures in fabric.” Perhaps Dr. Lindsley did not expect my answer, either, because he promptly replied, “What would you do with *that*?”

That exchange set in motion a journey I never imagined but that has its origins in childhood affinities and has been nurtured by my walk with the Lord and the companionship of my C.S. Lewis Fellows. What, indeed, would I do with *that*?

In 2007 I had never heard of “art quilts,” but that is what I have been making since then, my “pictures in fabric.” As a slow learner, I took classes to develop the skills to turn ideas into reality, to make wall hangings that might bring beauty or inspiration to the beholder. The fact is, I sense that something in me was made to create, though I have never pursued formal art training and have not quite embraced the identity of “artist.” If this is a God-breathed aspect of my being, then surely He has His hand in it, and the journey is as much about hearing Him as it is about making quilts.

Yet I will describe frankly my ongoing dialogue with Him.

I still ask, “Lord, is it really a valid spiritual exercise for me to spend my time engaged in an amateur handicraft?” He answers me with deep communion as I meditate on the Scriptures that have inspired a piece I am working on, as I pray over the message my quilt might convey, or as I worship Him for the creation that has fired my imagination. He also sends encouragement to me through His saints, past and present. At the Fellows Retreat in 2010, Dr. Chris Mitchell introduced me to the writing of Dorothy Sayers, who wrote what could be my own manifesto:

“I believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of all things. That is the thundering assertion with which we start; that the great fundamental quality that makes God, and us with him, what we are is creative activity...“In the beginning God created”; from everlasting to everlasting. He is God the Father and Maker. And, by implication, man is most god-like and most himself when he is occupied in creation. And by this statement we assert further that the will and power to make is an absolute value, the ultimate good-in-itself, self-justified and self-explanatory.”

Another topic that recurs in my prayers sounds like this: “Lord, I am afraid of letting You down. Really mature Christians are doing great things in Your kingdom, but I am not.” Trusting God’s leading tests my understanding of the truth about the body of Christ and exposes a besetting sin of self-doubt and comparison with others. It is a marvelous, liberating fact that “God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose” (1 Cor. 12:18 ESV)—different on purpose!

Reflecting on the role of an organ in the mystical body of Christ, C.S. Lewis affirms that the “structural position in the Church which the humblest Christian occupies is eternal and even cosmic.”² Lewis also states, “Those who are members of one another become as diverse as the hand and the ear. That is why the worldlings are so monotonously alike compared with the almost fantastic variety of the saints.”³

Can I really take a deep breath and live out of this conviction? And is it possible that making art—even quilts—can be a way to point people to Jesus?

Well, I am by every measure a novice art quilter, but isn't it the nature of God to use the foolish and simple to speak for Him? (I recall that Moses insisted he was not eloquent enough to do the job God assigned to him.) So, having made about a dozen quilts, I submitted two to a biannual exhibition called Sacred Threads. Both were accepted for the show in Herndon, Virginia, in July 2015. One quilt was chosen for the show's traveling exhibit, on tour throughout the United States for the next two years. The doors opened for me, and the lessons I am learning are evidence to me of the Lord's hand.

Although this exhibition is not a Christian ministry, its themes and openness to all forms of spirituality gave a forum for the biblical content of my two pieces. I was emboldened by the terms of the exhibit to express in words what was portrayed visually. Every quilt was displayed with an artist's written statement.

Both of my quilts were based on explicitly biblical themes. *Torn*, inspired by a Matthias Grünewald painting called *The Small Crucifixion*, portrays the pierced hand of Jesus on the cross. My statement referred to His agony and described this quilt “as a prayer of thanks to the one who loved so completely.” It is not every day that I have the opportunity to say things to complete strangers with a visual aid at hand that points them to the Lord and Redeemer.

More recently I've presented my work—aspects of its inspiration and my spiritual journey—at two local churches. How did that happen? I didn't seek out the opportunities, but, when asked to speak, I accepted the challenge.

As to my “calling,” the fundamental command of Jesus is “follow Me.” I am learning that a life of transparency and obedience can point to Jesus, a way of saying, like Paul, to believers and not-yet-believers alike, “Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ” (1 Cor. 11:1 ESV). ■■



Notes:

¹ Dorothy L. Sayers, “What Do We Believe?” in *Letters to a Diminished Church: Passionate Arguments for the Relevance of Christian Doctrine* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2004), 11.

² C.S. Lewis, “Membership,” in *The Weight of Glory* (New York: HarperCollins, 2001), 171.

³ *Ibid.*, 167.

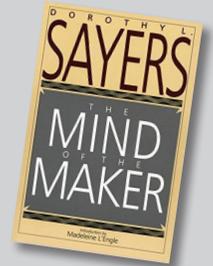


Terry Peckarsky, a native of Northern Virginia, attended Mary Washington College, where she first tasted the grace of friendship with Jesus through an Encounter with Christ retreat weekend. Terry completed Year One of the Fellows Program in 2007. She has been an editor, a homeschooling mom, and a long-time dabbler in the arts. Terry and her husband, Todd, have two adult children.

RECOMMENDED READING

Dorothy L. Sayers, *The Mind of the Maker* (HarperCollins, 1987)

This classic, with a new introduction by Madeleine L'Engle, is by turns an entrancing meditation on language; a piercing commentary on the nature of art and why so much of what we read, hear, and see falls short; and a brilliant examination of the fundamental tenets of Christianity.



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