Sermon Creativity For Changemakers
By Cynthia Sojourner
Niles Discovery Church, Fremont, CA
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I'm honored Pastor Jeff and the Worship team decided that I would be good at preaching on today's theme of Creativity for Changemaking, because of my poetry, quilting, and liturgical arts.

Since this Worship Series requires a shorter sermon, my greatest Creativity will be my Olympic-level Extreme-Editing.

Let's go!

In our first scripture,
Creativity for Changemaking begins with an unnamed woman, with a bad reputation, entering a home where she's not invited. She creatively makes room for herself at the table, by kneeling at the feet of Jesus. Her creative bending of social customs and rules goes into full swing when she starts crying and dares to wash the feet of Jesus with her tears, dry his feet with her hair, and anoint his feet with fragrant expensive ointment.

Jesus recognizes that Simon, the elite, educated, and religious host of the dinner party is negatively judging this apparently well-known sinful woman, who dared to enter his home and break all kinds of rules and customs. Jesus recognizes that Simon is also judging him for allowing the woman to touch him.

Everybody knew women weren't allowed to touch men in public.

Jesus' Creativity for Changemaking starts as soon as he allows this woman to do the foot washing and anointing. Jesus' Creativity continues when he creatively uses the traditional Pharisaic teaching methods of story telling, question and answer, and debate. Jesus is brilliant at coming up with excellent questions and stories to get questioners and listeners to expand their understanding beyond normal traditional understandings of laws, culture, and prophecies. Jesus frequently uses this method to turn the limited understanding, perspective, judgement, and condemnation of people into an opening for God's lavish mercy and love for a person being judged.

Using these practices, Jesus identifies the acts of this woman as creative and daring faith, sufficient repentance, and extravagant, much better hospitality than what host Simon provided him. Jesus points out that Simon didn't provide the customary hospitable water and towel for cleaning feet or a welcoming kiss for him.

Jesus' Creativity doesn't stop here. His creative thinking has him proclaiming that the woman has been saved by her faith and her sins are forgiven. He tells her, "To go in peace."

Traditionally, forgiveness of sins is reserved for priests and prophets to proclaim during religious ceremonies.

People at the table start asking what makes Jesus think he's qualified to forgive sins? This question isn't directly answered in our passage.

However, the answer might be seen in how Jesus and the unnamed woman show us that trying something new can save a person from despair, exclusion, poverty, and sins placed on them by unfair life circumstances. Jesus joined the woman in bending normal gender, hospitality, cleanliness, and priestly customs, rules, and boundaries. Maybe our seeing the woman leaving, blessed with peace, no longer burdened by sins is answer enough. He did it with her!

Their creative collaboration bent and broke broken societal customs, rules, and laws. They remind me of the Multitudes of Civil Rights activists, including Representative John Lewis, NOW activist and author Gloria Steinen, Justice Ruth Bader Ginsberg, San Francisco's First Out Gay Mayor, Harvey Milk, and Farm Worker Union Leader Dorothy Huertes.

The bravery, creativity, and gracious rule breaking of Jesus and the unnamed woman also remind me of the way art and artists use creativity to help change the ways people see, feel, hear, think, and act.

Something profound or surprising in art can stretch perspectives and inspire people to be Changemakers. Art can move people into healing, hope, peace, lovely memories, and joy.

I found great joy and friendship in collaborating with over 50 members of our congregation to create over 40 art quilts. On the sanctuary walls are samples from 10 different liturgical art series that help change people into a spirit of Worship.

Our Liturgical Art leader Sandy Thomas has given us a beautiful sculpted nest, flying birds, and Easter eggs to help us hatch our compassion, collaboration, and creativity into changemaking ideas.

Creativity and art also fill our scriptures, music, litanies, sermons and communion.

During our last Worship series on Air, we were invited to look at the sky and journal reflections. My creativity compelled me to look at the sky, photograph it, and write a daily poem. Here's one of those poems that creatively sees the sky changing, and including all of us.

Do You Ever Look At Yourself, Sky?
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Do you ever look at yourself, Sky,
Wearing your forever-changing wardrobe?

Your cloud series are always
Beyond fabulous, you must know.
Your day to night color choices
With sunrise, sunsets, storms
Are absolutely stunning.
As if these aren't enough,
You go ahead and jewel yourself
With birds in flight,
Entire flocks of parrots, flamingos,
Swallow murmurations,
As well as millions of solo flights
Of hummingbird, nesting crane, owl.
You jewel yourself
In every kind of winged insect.
Your butterflies, dragonflies, are favs.
Mosquito clouds, not so much.
You just can't stop adorning yourself.
The way you wear trees,
In all their glory, colors, shapes,
Dancing, and shadow silhouettes,
Can't be beat.
Then again, you dare to wear skyscrapers,
Mountain ranges, oceans, deserts,
And plains with herds of buffalo,
Elephants, every imaginable herd of deer.
Truly Sky,
You are a Runway Queen Supreme.
The way you wear flowers, beautiful,
No comparison.
Every pebble, shaft of rye, pumpkin patch,
Cold-blooded snake, ground squirrel,
Human heart beating,
Joyfully awaits each moment
You pick us out, up.
Squeeze us into your shine, winds,
Starlight in darkness,
Rainy day cool blues,
And fired-up sunrises, sunsets.
Sky, you are mesmerizingly addictive.
You make life worth living,
Can't live without.
Thank you for spotlighting
All us
In your forever changing wardrobe.

Love your creativity,
Daily invitations
To wake, breathe, wave, party,
Sing, rest,
In your elusive, inclusive,
Divine sublime finery.

Now let's get to our second scripture. My creative thinking has me seeing all our fellowship times with food, conversation, learning, caring, and serving others as mini-reenactments of Jesus teaching, healing, and feeding the Multitudes. Imagine that!

Imagine our conversations over food are providing Jesus-like new information, assurances, healing, awe, and new possibilities that change people and situations.

Imagine joining a ministry, trying a new project, becoming a leader, or changing the way something is done makes us creative Changemakers, like those early disciples who handed out 5 loaves and 2 fish to thousands of hungry people, and then ended up with leftovers.

We are Changemakers when we leave Worship and find creative ways to share what we've learned in life. The peace of Christ we offer changes the world around us. Our expressions of love for neighbors change the world.

You don't have to be an artist or perfect to be a creative Changemaker. You just need to be brave and creative enough to try something new or do something a bit differently. You don't have to do everything alone, collaborate!

When we let go of judgment to enter into a new creative adventure, the grace, mercy, power, and appreciation of Jesus can fill you, me, our families, neighbors, the planet with joy, with healing. It can be life saving.