

Discernment and the creative process of art-- Continued

Part V: Letting Go

Our leader then asked us to focus on the images we were thinking of painting. Maybe we looked around at home first and our eye fell on a blank wall we have always wanted to fill. This would be a good time to paint something for that space! Perhaps we saw a painting we liked recently in a gallery and thought we will do one just like that. Our leader asked us to focus on any images we had brought to the workshop that we thought we were going to paint when we arrived and then – let them go! Imagining our life’s next steps or outcomes is not a bad thing to do. But sometimes we need to take the image we have in our heads and let go of it. We need to clear the way for a new idea or pattern to emerge.

After these exercises, we began preparing our canvases. As we applied our first layers of texture to a blank canvas, it was not yet clear to anyone what the final “picture” would be. But with childlike, playful abandon, we slathered molding paste, sprinkled ordinary table salt into molding gel, glued down crumpled tissue paper and aluminum foil, and generally made a mess. It was glorious. Though we were each using all the same materials, no two canvases looked alike when we were finished. In the same way each of us is a unique child of God and as we engage in life we each have mind body and spirit to work with and yet our lives remain unique in the midst of the myriad of choices we engage in every day.

Part VI: “Colors” of life

The next day we began applying color: first a thin wash of color overall and then progressively deeper shades. We printed paint on our canvases with bubble wrap and spray painted through bits of old lace. We splattered, dabbed and stamped. Through all this untidy, exciting activity, slowly our paintings began to “emerge”. As I carried my paintings into the house after the class was over and propped them up on the mantle to appreciate and ponder, the Spirit nudged me with thoughts of how like life in the Spirit this whole endeavor had been: messy, thrilling creative work with no guarantees most of the time what the outcome will be. Certainly, life gives us many opportunities to let go of what we thought would happen and be open to a new way. Applying the “colors” of life, lights and shadows, designs and accidental spills, we get to see what emerges. Even the simple acts of meditative silence, writing a statement of purpose and every day joys of creating beauty (symbolized in the arranging of flowers) contribute to the whole “picture” of what is the mystery of creating a unique life before the face of God using what He provides and being incredibly, wordlessly embraced with the joy of it all. As we “create” our life from day to day, being aware of God’s presence in all the moments is what holds us.