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Creating a Story Holder



MYLINDA BAITS



SUPPORT PLEDGED



GLOBAL

“You shall be a crown of beauty in the hand of the Lord.” Isaiah 62:3 ESV

In May I was invited to facilitate a collaborative art making process during this year's International Christian Alliance on Prostitution Global Conference. The conference gathered over 300 people from across the globe who are actively engaged in anti-trafficking ministries. I'd been wanting to create a mosaic stained glass window with this community for years and was glad to now get the opportunity to do it. Although I had been pondering and praying about the process for quite some time, I really had no idea how the final piece would turn out.

Beauty Restores (*bring back, return or repair or renovate*)

A month prior to ICAP, I received a note from friends in Oregon that their church had a shed full of stained glass windows, damaged from a propane explosion in their parking lot. They had been sitting, collecting dust for years and the church was looking to get rid of them. Would I be interested in taking some off their hands? Of course, and now I have enough glass for years of projects! I cut some of the glass into smaller sizes and packed the 48 lbs of broken glass into a suitcase to travel with me from Washington state to Wisconsin.

At a reclaimed building materials and salvage store, we found old paned windows that were the size I was looking for. After sharing with the shop keeper the purpose of the ICAP gathering and how we planned to use them in the worship setting, she generously offered them as a buy one, get the other three free.

With bits of dusty and broken glass placed on no longer useful windows, could beauty restore us?

Beauty Revives (*to live again, restore to life, regain strength or energy*)

I set out tables with the glass pieces spilling out from the center of a globe to represent how at times we feel overwhelmed: that our worlds are falling apart, spilling out and broken into pieces because of the suffering we see and have experienced. I invited everyone to choose one piece of colored glass that expressed something about themselves. They were to reflect throughout the day on the shape, the color, the texture, the sharp edges and the meaning of their piece. It could also be used as a way to create conversation and curiosity, opening up opportunities to share stories and impressions of why they picked their particular piece and what it means for them. These small, shattered, fragmented and fragile glass pieces began to live again as they took on the meaning of the lives that held them.

By attaching meaning to the bits, could beauty bring life back and revive us?

Beauty Refreshes ([*reinvigorate*](#), [*revitalize*](#), [*fortify*](#), [*enliven*](#), [*stimulate*](#), [*reanimate*](#))

I imagined that following the Holy Spirit's lead in the anti-trafficking movement was a bit like the unseen yet very present movement of the deep ocean currents interacting with the wind driven surface currents creating streams and swirls similar to how Van Gogh interpreted the heavens in Starry Night. A new understanding for me of "on earth as it is in heaven". To capture this idea of movement, I attached a few swirling, wavelike lines of dark blue glass on the empty window panes to form a scaffold or structure. Everyone was invited to add their small, broken piece to the window. It was an offering of their uniqueness, gifting, story to the whole. To be mindful of where they fit, to leave space between, to pay attention to who they follow and to how and where they lead. At the beginning it seemed chaotic and without form or shape. It was messy, at times confusing, sometimes frustrating not knowing how it was "supposed to" turn out. The "not really knowing where I fit" or letting go and offering "my broken piece" act surfaced deep feelings right away in some

while the significance of the act came later for others. The interplay of the different shapes and colors began to add new life and beauty to the old windows. It was refreshing to see all of the pieces coming together in ways that I couldn't have expected. Once everyone placed their piece, there were many empty spaces between to fill in, so a small group of us continued to work through the day and evening to use up all of the glass that I brought. We found that we only had enough glass to finish three of the four windows so we concentrated on those with a promise that I will bring more glass to the next gathering where we'll finish the final one. This shows that we are always in process and hopeful that the work will continue. Undone is still beautiful and there is wisdom in the waiting.

Can this active engagement in creativity refresh and revitalize us?

Beauty Reconciles (to restore friendship or harmony, to settle, to bring together, resolve)

Once all of the stained glass pieces were glued to the window glass, I invited a diverse group of people to help me put grout into the empty spaces. The grout is made of a powder like cement mixed with water into a thick paste that seeps into the spaces between to form a permanent bond, unifying the separate pieces into one. It softens the rough edges and hardens later to create a strong connection. It is the messiest part of the process. We had to get our hands dirty to work the grout into the creases. It covered up all of the colors at first until the spaces set up and the extra could be wiped off. We spent the whole day cleaning and scraping grout to uncover the beauty underneath and in between. Like the Holy Spirit moving in, around and through us to bring us together.

Can the beauty that comes from our unity reconcile us?

Beauty Recreates (to create again, to reproduce or reenact)

We began to discover the beauty not only of the process, but also emerging in the product of our creation. This art object, the stained glass mosaic windows, ***held our common story***. They had become more and more valuable for all of us. The result of our work together became the ***holder of our stories***, a reminder of our beautiful and broken experiences being brought together by the Spirit of God who carefully and lovingly made, remade and continues to recreate us. The mosaic metaphor became a visual description of our individual as well as common life. The experience of creating something together is held in each person's memory and our community memory is revealed through, held up and remembered in the object itself.

Will we allow ourselves to be created again by the beauty that recreates us?

Throughout the week as we were completing the large three paneled mosaic, people would ask me what we were going to do with the finished windows. I really had no idea what was going to become of them. My role was to create the process and we hadn't decided where the finished product would reside. The "where" and "what are you going to do with them now" became the million dollar questions. Since none of us knew if what we would create together would be worth holding onto, we hadn't made plans for it. Since the windows became the ***story holder*** of ICAP, they will be used again for the next global gathering. In the meantime, one panel is available to be used at Green Lake Conference Center, another panel will grace the space of the home offices of International Ministries, and the third is with one of the ICAP counselors who will bring it back to be joined with the others in three years. The scattering and regathering of the panels can remind us of our leavings and comings as well, though separate, we need each other and beauty is made whole when Christ's light shines through us all together.

What a gift and honor it was for me to be a part of Beauty. Thank you for making the world more beautiful by offering your part as well.

Held in the beauty that restores, revives, refreshes, reconciles and recreates,

My linda