

Although sharing much common ground when it comes to philosophy and ministry, often Mary and Bob find themselves approaching ministerial concerns from different angles... *He said - She said* is a venue to share differing perspectives and provide food for thought.

Inspiration When Life is in Full Swing

Bob's Perspective

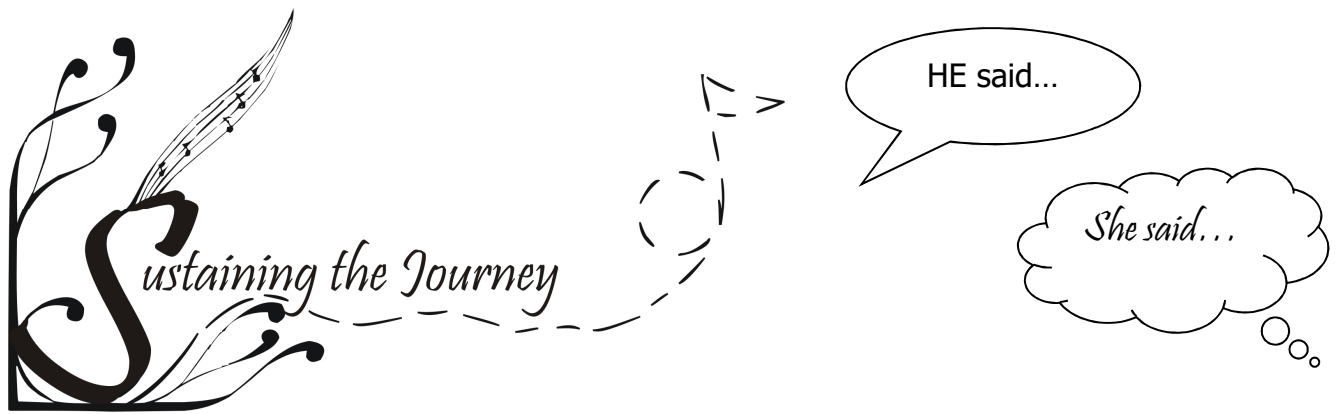
When September hits just look out! School starts, meetings start, rehearsals start - and with them comes extra time spent to prepare for all of the aforementioned events – LIFE IS IN FULL SWING! Slower paced and shorter work days turn into running from one thing to the other from early morning to late at night. It's easy to become inspired and creative when life is moving at a slower pace, but when all Detroit breaks loose, how do we find the time for our dear friends Inspiration and Creativity (I & C)?

I know that I've struggled to find ways over the years with varying degrees of success. I have found that I need to make an "appointment" with our old friends, I & C, if I want to have any hope of meeting up with them. I'm not saying that I'm creative on demand (I will be inspired, NOW!), but what I am saying is that I allow myself designated time each day (sometimes a longer span and sometimes just moments) to do activities that will invite I & C to be present.

This designated time may come in the form of reading, or playing the piano, or listening to some new music, or just sitting quietly and reflecting. Inspiration and Creativity may not come to visit each time, but by designing an environment around and within myself I increase my chances of having a productive encounter.

Each of us have our own daily routines and patterns, so maybe we look at them and ask, "How do I make these routines and patterns more conducive to meeting up with my friends I & C?" Or I might ask: "With all of the demands on my time when life is in full swing, how do I even find the time to allow for Inspiration and Creativity?"

In order tackle this issue, first thing I have to consider comes by asking: "Do I consider Inspiration and Creativity to be my friends, or do I see them as just another chore (something



to be accomplished)?” Thinking of them as friends makes me want to spend more time with them, or at least explore ways of including them in my day.

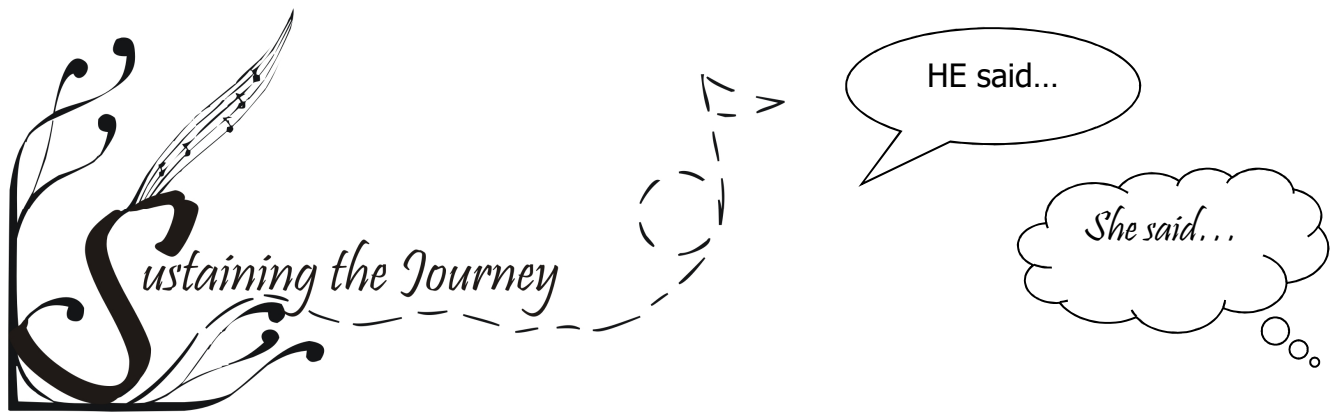
For example, if I’m all about playing new music, maybe I should set out my instrument in a place that I pass by frequently. (O.K. it may not be so easy with a pipe organ, but an electric keyboard may do in a pinch.) Then as I pass by it, on occasion, I just may take just a moment to play something – a favorite song, something new, an exercise, or just improvise from my heart – again just like saying “Hi” to an old friend for a moment and then moving on with my day.

If reading is my thing, I think about placing periodicals or short articles around my environment that I can pick up and enjoy for a moment or two as I pass by – or maybe putting an i-Pad or Kindle on my treadmill, so I can pass the time of mindless walking by catching up with my old friends I & C.

How about turning off the all the junk on TV and spending time in quiet, or just listening to music? Or, being a TV junkie, I might try doing something that promotes I & C during the commercials. I have found that in less than 10 minutes, I can play all of the major scales (2 octaves) and 3 to 5 Hanon exercises. OR if I’m having difficulty with a new piece of music, I take the few tough measures and play them as an exercise. A one hour TV show has approximately 28 minutes of actual programming and 32 minutes of commercials. I don’t usually have a whole dedicated hour to practice in a given day, but one evening I calculated that in just saying “Hi” to I & C during the commercials, I practiced for a little better than an hour – the commercial breaks were concentrated, focused and very productive.

Again, the secret for me is to work myself out of the mindset of having to get this practice (or any other chore or task) finished Instead, I try view it as taking a few moments to enjoy being with my friends I & C. This may all sound a little nuts, but this mindset works in a wide variety of situations.

So what do you think?



Mary's Perspective

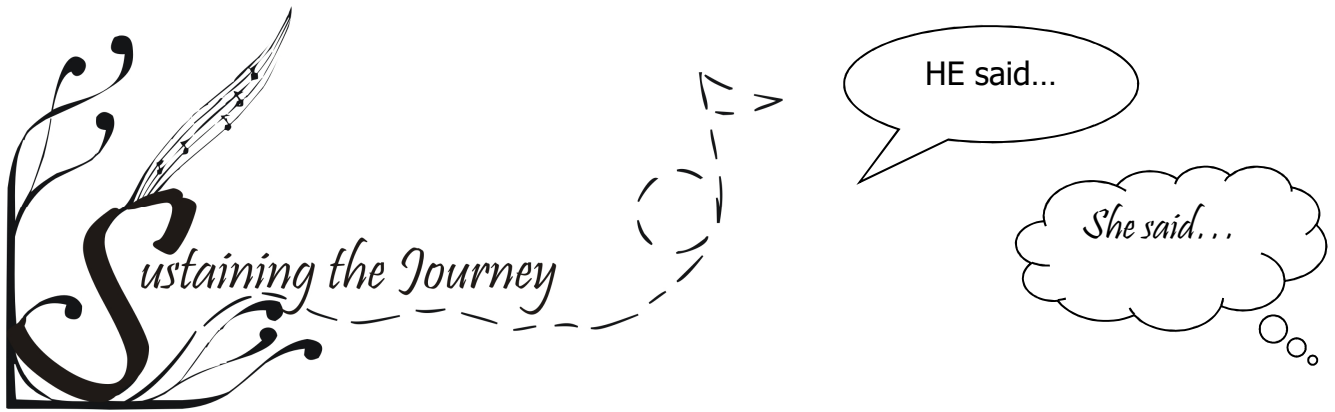
I may be just a teensy bit guilty of saying “okay, God, I need to be inspired and creative RIGHT NOW...” When I have a project to accomplish, it’s not the best plan to block out time in my calendar and think *I will be brilliant from 3pm to 5pm next Tuesday*. And so I do agree with Bob that it’s better so “set the stage” for I & C to visit. In addition to his suggestions, I have a few other strategies.

Our brains are wonderfully complicated, and continue to work behind the scenes even when we are not aware. Many times I’ll struggle with an idea – whether it’s a creative concept, or the structure of a project, or even recalling an old friend’s name – and find that, if I let go and get some sleep, often the solution is present when I wake up. We can mull things over in our waking hours, but our brains continue to work on it while we slumber. To facilitate this process, I highly recommend keeping a pen and pad of paper by your bedside. If you awaken in the middle of the night and think, “a-HA!”, you can write down the brilliant idea and then sleep even more restfully because you won’t be burdened by trying to remember until daylight.

Another way I invite I & C into my life is only going to resonate with some people... I have learned over the years that there are folks whose days are very driven by the clock. For example, I get up at 6. I eat lunch at noon. I leave my office at 5. I watch Jeopardy at 7:30. I’m in bed by 10. At any point in the day, they know what is coming based on what time it is, and they also tend to be very dependable folks. They show up when they say they will. These people rarely get lost in a project because they know in 10 minutes it will be time to complete whatever is on the schedule in 10 minutes.

I have found that there are other people for whom the time is less important, and the content of the day is what matters. So, for example, if shopping is part of today’s plan, they may know what time they are leaving, but they will return when the shopping is done. In the case of an artist, this is the person who gets so engrossed in designing the painting or writing the music, that they forget to eat lunch (and sometimes even dinner!). Bob and I laughed, reminiscing about the day he went down to his office and got so involved in planning, writing, and arranging the Christmas preludes that when his stomach growled and he thought it might be lunchtime, he was surprised to find the parish office dark and locked – and even more surprised that it was 8:00pm!

Now, I certainly don’t ever advocate skipping meals. However, if Inspiration and Creativity have come for a visit, I support letting them stay as long as they want. For me, if a project is really going



well and the creative juices are flowing, stopping to eat supper because it is 6pm tends to squelch the progress, and if/when I return, I never feel quite the inspiration that I had felt initially. Having a snack while I keep working helps me see the project to its artistic fruition (without needing to kill someone because I'm hangry – and yes, that IS a thing!). To use Bob's analogy, when an old friend stops by, we stay and visit, even if we lose track of the time (actually, sometimes those are the best visits!). If Creativity and Inspiration are our old friends, encourage the relationship by allowing your whole self to be engaged in the process.

I do believe there is room, and even a need, for both content- and clock-driven people in our lives. Sometimes we have friction because we don't think the same way, but it is worth supporting each other in our ways. One final thought... surround yourself with life-giving relationships. Spend time with the daughter who oozes positivity. Have lunch with the friend who makes you laugh. Tell your spouse what you're working on, and encourage them in their endeavors. The more you express your creativity to others, the more frequently inspiration will visit. And the more we facilitate I & C, the richer our lives will be!