

Charlie's Creativity Podcast Series
April 3, 2010

It's the Saturday after Maundy Thursday. The Saturday after Good Friday. That Friday, so long ago, that my savior suffered and died on a cross so that we who believe and trust may live. This day, Saturday, is the sort of black day, the day of tension before the tremendous display of death defying power that Almighty God displays in raising Jesus from the grave to life! I'm just living for a short time, just for today, in that tension.

Hi! My name is Charlie Gross. Welcome to my creativity podcast series. Today's reflection has to do with an engaging conversation in Ligonier, PA at the Antiochian Village. The Synod of the Trinity hosted presbytery leadership for a 24 hour overnight event with the brilliant thought leader, the Rev Dr Alan Roxburgh from the Roxburgh Missional Network. I thought the dialogue was both inspiring and challenging. Let me tell you about it. [O, before I forget, I lined up this leading Christian thinker for a podcast called Missional Church Conversations – making it real. He will be interviewed by the Rev Dr Michael Wilson on April 26th and will be uploaded to iTunes later that day. Just search iTunes for Missional church conversations and voila you'll find a great new set of conversations]

Any way, Alan named the issues right from the start. There is no map for where we are headed. There are no technical steps to get there. So, as leaders, let's face that fact, stop wringing our hands wishing that the road was marked, that the path was lighted and that we had the white horse to ride. It's pretty obvious that the old way of doing church does not work, so let's get over it and move on.

Right from the beginning, Alan started using the language of experimentation. He started softening us up to creating learning collaborations, laboratories of conversations and thought leaders. Envisioning and imagining a preferred future and then asking how that possibility could inform our present activities. Challenging ideas, but o so necessary! Particularly if there is no IT, no bulls eye, no program or silver bullet.

Dr. Roxburgh suggested some intriguing ways of leading. First, start framing an argument for what's going on. Create some dialogue around the issues that are confronting us as leaders. And, in this framing act, know that the issues that are being named are not the real work, but are the substance in which we, as leaders, work on our leadership skills and abilities. So, the take-away is the deliberate, intentional conversations with others in this work. Cobble together some others who can help push your thinking into new areas of possibility. You may even go back to some good ole fashion brainstorming around ways of naming, framing, thinking and seeing cultural issues and shifts that are all around us. [as an aside, think about this. When this podcast is over, who could you call to suggest a think-tank of your own? This is not trivial work – it IS your work]

Some other aspects of the challenge are these nuggets: Your imagination is too small! We serve a huge, gigantic, sovereign, life-giving God. Why do we cower and cringe and look down? God is breaking apart boxes, breaking down walls and boundaries and doing smash ups for His glory. To get on this bus, we should also join in the box breaking, boundary crossing, unlimited thinking arena. In fact, as we seek to “go for it,” we should be asking what **is** good about the dwindling resources and social and political chaos. By changing our attitudes, values and habits, we affect the very outcomes. We are the IT, the answer, the shapers of the future. So, by changing ourselves, we are changing a lot more. Alan suggests that we embrace the confusion and the crumbling walls as gifts.

So, my question, friends, is “what are we waiting for?” What is it that if it were impossible to fail, we would do? What limits do we place on ourselves by assumptions, attitudes, values and habits? How do we start some serious work on these? This is hard work. Can we ask for help to get at our own deeply held attitudes, values and habits? By breaking these apart, we can make some little changes that will act as the rudder of a large ship and start to turn in wonderful ways toward ports that are exotic. I believe that this is precisely what Alan means in his proposal of starting learning communities, conducting experiments, and growing our imaginations.

Finally, one of the key pieces that I heard in this conversation is to stop being so passive and take the initiative to lead. Do this by an active listening to the culture and by an active imagination in a hope-filled future. Digging a little deeper here, Alan suggests “moving back into the neighborhood.” Building relationships and building community. Caring for others by noticing the gaps and working to fill those gaps. This is real. Real listening. Real community. Real relationships and real leadership.

Well friends, that’s what I heard. Real meat for real leaders. I can’t wait to start putting more conversations together, naming the issues, wrestling with ideas and experiments and creating some action teams to make a powerful, positive difference in the world. That gets my juices flowing.

That’s it for today. I hope you have a take-away that is useful for your work. For more of these podcasts, visit charliegross.com or charliescreativity.com. bye for now.