

The Voice

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Aboriginal Women’s Art Studio

Jess Kritzer, Program Coordinator and Teacher, reports on progress at the CMNs Aboriginal Women’s Art Studio following its move to a new art space at Prahran Mission.

Creative Ministries Network Aboriginal Art Access Studio provides a painting workshop for the women of Winja Ulupna alcohol/drug recovery house. The group meets on a weekly basis to explore a variety of issues related to Aboriginality as well as addiction through a creative arts practice focused on painting. Each student is encouraged to define and explore her own subject matter inclusive of both traditional and contemporary influences in an effort to develop a personal style of mark making.



Moya, After Clifford Possum, acrylic on canvas, 30x30, 2011

CMN Studio facilitates each student towards the establishment of an arts practice that has the potential to continue beyond the duration of the program and aid in the generation of new models of living that will contribute towards the development of a more integrated sense of self, community, culture, and acceptance.

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2011 has seen CMN Studio relocate from a large private space at the CMN Hall in Hotham Street, St. Kilda, to a smaller shared space within Prahran Mission, Chapel Street. The move has reinvigorated the program and our group is enjoying the energy of a shared space as well as the interaction with artists/artworks from Prahran Mission.

The studio continues to focus on the development of artistic skills with the notion that the acquisition of these skills will foster a sense of accomplishment and success for our students and a positive outlook towards self and 'having a go' in the effort to learn and live well.

Our group has paid particular attention to colour theory and the mixing of cool and warm primary colours to form a signature palate. We took an excursion to the Pupunya Tula exhibition *Tjukurrjtjanu* at the National Gallery of Victoria expressly to investigate the use of colour and how it has changed since the 1970's.

We have emphasised experimentation and process over the production of finished works and students who have completed the program leave both with completed works and notes/research for a future practice.

The women who form our group have invariably left their families; some for a short time while they access the program offered by Winja Ulupna, and others for many years as they experience the isolation that accompanies drug and alcohol addiction.

The majority of women have children being cared for by others and a great deal of studio time is spent in the construction of artworks made by the mothers to be sent to their children. These works are often the first tentative step in the process of recovering self and family. This continues to be our most important work.



Norma Bamblett, *Butterflies*, acrylic on canvas, 30cmx 30cm, 2011

(The figure in the middle is the mother and the butterflies are the daughters... all flying towards a flower sun.)



"I like art, it brings me peace and keeps my mind occupied...I really enjoy it." Norma



"I like art; it's calming...that's about it." Debbie

Singing with Deborah

Rev. Dr. Jackson H. Day, visitor to the CMN for two weeks in November, was guest preacher at the recent Remembrance Sunday Choral Evensong service at Melbourne's St. Paul's Anglican Cathedral. The lectionary readings were from Judges 5:1-12, and Matthew 24:36-51. This is the text of Jack's sermon.

1. Introduction

I bring you greetings from the Baltimore-Washington Conference of the United Methodist Church, of which I'm a member, and from our Bishop, John Schol. I also bring you greetings from the International Conference of War Veteran Ministers. Many years ago I was a U. S. Army Chaplain in Vietnam, and later joined other clergy who are also war veterans to form this organization.

Every year, we conduct a spiritual healing retreat for war veterans with post-traumatic stress disorder, and their spouses and significant others. The retreats, which we have conducted in both the United States

and Canada, begin on Friday evening and conclude at Sunday noon. We come together in a circle and one of the leaders sets the stage by sharing his or her story of woundedness and healing. Then others have an opportunity to share their stories, lifting them to the healing presence of those gathered in the room.

On this Remembrance Day weekend, our lesson from the Hebrew Scriptures comes from the story of a warrior who lived long ago. The warrior was a woman named Deborah. And that means something special today when women comprise about 15% of the armed forces of both Australia and the United States.

But the 12 verses we just heard from the 5th chapter of the book of Judges, give us only a fragment of Deborah's story. If we restricted ourselves to that passage we would join in a song in praise of God's mighty deeds. That's a good thing to do, of course, but Deborah's story is much richer than that and she deserves for us to hear it all.

Those who study traumatic experiences and how we heal from them emphasize the importance of our stories. Trauma affects memories and the very act of telling our story to someone who is willing to listen with respect can make our memories coherent, bringing order out of chaos. Telling our story can be an act of meaning-making and thus connecting with God. Therefore in our retreats we speak of our stories as sacred.

Let us imagine that we are all seated in a circle. Deborah – as conveyed by the 4th and 5th chapters of the book of Judges -- is with us, and we invite her now to tell us her story. She begins to speak.

2. Deborah's story

My name is Deborah. I'm telling you my story now, but it's a story people have called the Song of Deborah and sung around campfires since 1200 BC. My story is a song of praise to God for the victory God has given us. (5:1)

When my song begins I was sitting under a palm tree in the hill country of Ephraim. I had been sitting there for so long people called it the "palm of Deborah (4:5)." I served as a Judge (4:4) and people brought me conflicts to be resolved, but the most heart-rending tales were of the difficulties they faced.

Times were difficult. We blamed ourselves. God was punishing us for turning to the worship of idols. We had fallen under the rule of a Canaanite king named Jabin and his military chief Sisera (4:2). Holding all power, they oppressed us for over 20 years (4:3). Their practice was to take everything

they could. Robbers stole from households; rapists violated our women and bandits kept the caravans from plying their route. Commerce stopped and anyone who needed to travel took the back roads because of the danger. (5:6).

One day God moved me to call Barak, of the tribe of Naphtali. I knew he could lead but he had no confidence. I told him to get together 10,000 men, (4:6-7) and I would go with him. (4:9-10). People often praise me for starting our uprising but I give God the credit (5:12). We had had enough of lawlessness; we were truly a whole oppressed people rising up. (5:15)

When our 10,000 men had assembled, Sisera rose to the bait, bringing out his 900 fearsome iron chariots. (4:8, 13). Then came God's part – the skies opened up and turned the land into rivers of mud, (5:21) trapping the chariots. Sisera's men panicked and fled, (4:15) ending as captives, (5:12) or dead. (4:16) Sisera fled on foot to the tent of a woman named Jael. Jael welcomed Sisera into her tent. (4:17-18) When Sisera said he was thirsty Jael gave him a skin of milk to drink, (4:19) and a bowl of curds (5:25). When he had fallen asleep, she drove a tent peg into his temple, and crushed his head with a hammer; in death he lay at her feet (4:21, 5:27).

So we sing a song to the glory of God, who has accomplished all this (5:2)! We imagine the misery of Sisera's wife as she waits and waits forever for her husband to come home. In my mind I can hear the words her princesses say to each other; they imagine their charioteers are



The Rev. Dr. Jackson Day (left) at St. Paul's Anglican Cathedral, with Rev. Dr. Ruth Redpath and Rev. John Bottomley after Choral Evensong

delayed returning because of all the booty they have taken, all the slaves they have captured, and all the women they are enjoying.

How I hate the 20 years of oppression under these Canaanites. How I enjoy the thought of their misery when they find out what has happened! (5:29-30). God, you are so powerful to have made this happen. We will raise a song to you, for mountains tremble with fear in front of you (5:5). So perish all your enemies, but those who love you will be like the sun rising in strength! (5:31)

3. Listening and reflecting

No one has interrupted Deborah as she speaks. In our retreats we have adopted from Native Americans of

When you have the stick, only you may speak and no one will interrupt. Others will listen.

the American Northwest the tradition of a talking stick. When you have the stick, only you may speak and no one will interrupt. Others will listen. It may seem a small thing to give someone uninterrupted attention, but it is huge. Like today's survivors of combat, Deborah needs acknowledgement, respect and honour. She has experienced a trauma and she needs recognition it is real. She needs some way of transforming her experience so that it can live in her past, not her present. And so, perhaps most of all, especially at the beginning, she needs someone to listen.

As we listen, we hear what Deborah is saying and what she is not saying. Her song praises God but we can hear her anger. Anger at Sisera and the oppression he's caused. Anger in her gleeful anticipation of the moment Sisera's wife and daughters

hear of his death.

Deborah's song is one of the Bible's many stories of reversal. When God's justice arrives, the last will be first, but, also, the first will be last. Even Mary, the mother of our Lord, when she sings the Magnificat upon discovering she is carrying Jesus in her womb, sees God's coming kingdom in this way: "He has filled the hungry with good things, and sent the rich away empty." (Luke 1:53)

And so as we listen to Deborah we hear the anger at 20 years' oppression and cruelty. We hear the vengeance, the praise of God for the suffering of her enemies: justice has been done. It doesn't come out in the English, but in the original Hebrew, scholars tell us, the story has a sexual allusion: Sisera, the one who raped, has now been raped himself. Praise God!

Deborah has the talking stick, so I can't interrupt her with thoughts and questions. I don't get to suggest that her praise of God is really trauma-based praise: her happiness at God's victory has an edge to it, and the edge is the anger she still carries. I don't get to tell Deborah that her story makes me uncomfortable. I'm not comfortable with glee at others' misfortune or thanking God for the deaths of others. I know Deborah would like me to sing with her, and I really cannot do that. But I can listen.

We talked about Deborah when our war veteran ministers got together in California a month ago, and so I know there are other thoughts in the room. (Members of the International Conference of War Veteran Ministers, Discussion on Deborah, was held at the 21st Annual Meeting Rancho Palos Verdes California, October

12, 2011.) There is a Vietnam veteran who is thinking that Deborah's experience was totally the opposite of his. He felt he lost his war. Deborah won hers, so he can't identify with her. But in this circle, he can listen.

There's another veteran in the room who feels he can't connect with Deborah. Deborah was a leader and her perspective reflected that of leaders, the generals at the top and not the boots on the ground. But this war veteran minister's unhealed anger at the military leadership of his day is part of his story, not Deborah's. At this moment Deborah has the talking stick, and he will listen.

Yet another veteran in the room is thinking that the very act of us giving an audience to Deborah – a warrior separated from us by three thousand years -- provides a way that we ourselves can talk about important things that we personally still need to keep some distance from. And so he listens.

In giving Deborah the assurance that she will be listened to, we are giving her something more than many of today's veterans receive. I presided some years ago at the funeral of a Vietnam veteran. I'd had a chance to talk with him a few days before he died of cancer. Alcohol was his way of bearing the pain he felt. He felt that as a veteran I could have understood his story, and that comforted him. But he never felt able to share it with anyone.

Our countries have men and women deployed in the Middle East today. When they return, like Deborah, they will have their own stories. Will there be someone to listen?

In the ancient book of Numbers (Numbers 31:19-24), the people of Israel are instructed that at the end of battle returning warriors are to remain outside the camp for seven

days to cleanse themselves. In that time stories could be told, regrets shared, meanings created, understanding achieved. Today's veterans often don't have such an opportunity.

4. The Hidden Deborah

As I sit in the circle listening to Deborah, I also listen for what she is not saying. There are parts of each of us that we protect from view, and I sense this in Deborah. Deborah is willing to share with us her anger, but I don't hear her speak of her pain. What losses of loved ones did she endure in those 20 years? What happened to Deborah herself in those dark days? What suffering did she herself go through? Why was it important to suggest in a roundabout fashion that Sisera was a rapist? As we listen to Deborah we can sense she is protecting something, but unless she shares it somehow, all the listening in the world won't tell us what it is.

So now though Deborah is free from Sisera, she is not yet free from her trauma. But the opportunity to talk about it, to sing about it, to express the very powerful negative feelings she has are important parts of healing. It's been said that holding on to anger is like drinking poison – and hoping the other person will die. Sharing one's story helps diminish its negative power. Perhaps Deborah senses that the very act of putting her story in words can help her distance herself from it. What happens in war can be so devastating that we need ways to remove ourselves from it. So Deborah's Song, leaving out some of the gore and giving God the credit, sanitizes the telling of the battle and gives some distance to the one who sings the song.

5. Letting Something Go.

In our retreats we have a worship service on Saturday evenings. Participants are given the homework of identifying something they are willing to let go. What would Deborah have let go?

In her song, we hear Deborah letting go of her fear, because Sisera is dead. Often it is anger that people let go, at least some piece of it, in some way. Would Deborah let go of a little of the anger or the trauma-based praise? But in her song she keeps singing the death of Sisera and the details of how it happened, serving to keep the trauma, the pain, and the anger alive.

I wish Deborah could find more to let go of, but perhaps for now letting go of the fear is enough. At our retreats those who let something go come to breakfast the next morning visibly lighter, no longer weighed down so much by a burden they have been carrying.

6. Something to take away.

On Sunday mornings we talk about what the resurrection can mean translated into lives restored from death, and the role trauma survivors can have returning to their lives, now as wounded healers. And so we ask participants to identify something they'll take with them.

The question really is, "now what do you want for yourself, for the rest of your life? "Is this enough for you, or do you want more?" For veterans at our retreats, the answer is already implicit: they want more.

But does Deborah? There is so much more in the Bible that I think Deborah never gets.

What would it take for Deborah to identify

with Isaiah's vision: "the wolf shall live with the lamb, the leopard shall lie down with the kid, the calf and the lion and the fatling together, and a little child shall lead them...They will not hurt or destroy on all my holy mountain; for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea" (Is 11:6, 9).

What would it take for Deborah to look at Christ suffering in death upon the cross and say, "Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world!"

Yet in her story I do hear something Deborah is taking away with her, something important, and something essential: her faith in God. Deborah holds to a faith in the God who **goes on before us**. That's what she told Barak that God had done, just before Barak went into battle. A God who goes before you is much more powerful -- and likely to be of more help to you and more demanding of you -- than a God that you bring with you, as if God could live in a container in your pocket. Deborah will leave our circle with her profound faith in a God who leads the way.

We will never know how much healing Deborah obtained for herself, singing her song, telling her story, sharing those moments of trauma-based praise that she has now shared with us, we who read the Bible over 3000 years later.

But we do know that the account of Deborah, prophet and Judge of Israel, ends with the statement that there was peace in the land for 40 years. (5:31).

May it be so for us!

Inaugurating a Uniting Church congregation at CMN

A congregation of the Uniting Church is to be inaugurated as a part of the Creative Ministries Network. This significant event follows the CMN Board signing a Memorandum of Understanding with the Uniting Church Presbytery of Port Phillip West to proceed with this initiative.

A Task Group established by the Presbytery to facilitate this initiative will recommend to the February Presbytery meeting that nine people be recognised as the founding members of the new congregation. The nine names were submitted by the CMN Board to the Presbytery late last year. Their recognition as founding members by the Presbytery will be the last step in the

journey to establish a UCA congregation as part of CMN.

The recognition of a congregation as part of CMN completes a long journey that began in February 1984 when a group of UCA ministers working in secular employment met to establish an urban ministry network. The meeting that day concluded with a worship service of Holy Communion at the home of one of the ministers. Now, 28 years later, another service is being held to celebrate the inauguration of a new congregation at CMN within the faith and unity of the Uniting Church.

This special service on the 28th anniversary of the Network's founding is at 7.00 p.m. on Sunday 26 February at 15 Cromwell Road, South Yarra. Please join the Network's friends and supporters to celebrate God's generous love in calling forth this new community.

Tax deductibility for gifts and donations to CMN

Last November, CMN received good news from the Australian Tax Office. Gifts or donations to our programs, (except for the Sri Lanka Partnership Project), can now be claimed as a tax deduction. Specifically, the Creative Ministries Network is now a 'public benevolent institution under item 4.1.1 of section 30-45 of the Income Tax Assessment Act 1997'.

This new tax status means that the Creative Ministries Network is now eligible to apply for funding from a wider range of charitable trusts. Businesses who donate to CMN can also receive a receipt for tax deductibility.

The CMN Board is committed to expanding all our programs for healing, justice and reconciliation that support those affected by trauma, violence and oppression in Australia. Please make your personal contribution to the "Creative Ministries Network" and indicate if you wish your gift or donation to be used to support a specific program.