

Dear Class Member,

Although, we will not be using the following lesson for our discussion (unless students request otherwise, then I'd be happy to use the following), I thought the links to the amazing snow artwork might be inspirational and timely for the snow day we're experiencing today.

The following lesson is the alternative to the primary suggested lesson for Sunday, and highlights the ephemeral work of snow, sand, and land artists who are intrigued by the various ways nature intersects with human life. The news provides us the opportunity to explore what our faith teaches us about the impermanence and fragility of life, as well as to be in awe of the creativity of God; and God's invitation to us to share in that creativity, as people created in the image of God.

I hope you are enjoying the snow day. Stay safe, stay warm, and may you feel the warmth of the loving arms of your Heavenly Father surrounding and uplifting you this day.

Blessings,
Pastor Ben



Artist Creates Giant Drawing on Snowy Finnish Golf Course

The Wired Word for the Week of February 21, 2021

In the News

Recently, information technology consultant and amateur artist Janne Pyykkö spent two days creating what is believed to be the largest snow drawing ever made in Finland, by taking thousands of steps in geometric patterns on a golf course. Pyykkö designed his snow art on his computer before using rope and snowshoes to bring it to life on the snow-covered Löfkulla golf course, near the capital, Helsinki, with the help of 11 members of a Finnish snowshoeing Facebook group.

Measuring 525 feet across, the snow drawing consisted of six snowflakes, each unique, connected by a star in the center. Knowing that the artwork would be temporary, the volunteers hurried to follow the artist's instructions so as to finish the fleeting masterpiece before wind and snow hid all traces of their collaborative effort.

Pyykkö said he has been inspired by British cartographer Simon Beck, who in 2009 began creating mandala-like designs of circles, spirals, diamonds and triangles, on sand and snow. Initially, Beck used the practice as a way to exercise, but increasingly, it became a form of meditative artistry.

Most artists create something they hope will have some permanence, enough so that their work of art may hang on a museum wall or stand as a sculpture in a city park.

"When I do something, I like to have something to show for it," Beck told an audience at a TED Talk. So what does he have to show for the hours of painstaking work he spent creating art that can be washed or blown away in minutes so soon after he gave it birth? Photographs that memorialize the process and the finished products.

British nature artist, Andy Goldsworthy, crafts artwork from materials he finds in the environment, such as rocks, ice, leaves, twigs, reeds, thorns, etc. Then, through photography, he documents how his creations change over time as the environment changes.

"It's not about art," he stated. "It's just about life and the need to understand that a lot of things in life do not last."

"Nature is in a state of change and that change is the key to understanding," Goldsworthy explained. "I want my art to be sensitive and alert to changes in material, season and weather. Each work grows, stays, decays. Process and decay are implicit. Transience in my work reflects what I find in nature."

British land artist Richard Shilling, who was inspired by Andy Goldsworthy's transitory sculptures, wrote that "What is important to me throughout what I do is the ephemeral nature of our environment, the cycles, how everything is in flux and ever changing and how all existence is transient."

Sand artist Andres Amador creates his transitory artwork on beaches. It's a kind of planned obsolescence as he creates art on a canvas that is constantly changing.

Amador deliberately seeks "imperfect" beaches that have rock outcroppings and other natural features that interrupt any art he creates.

"There's an error in every one of my designs," he says.

For transitory art, mistakes are par for the course. For Beck, there are three options when a mistake is made: 1) alter the design, incorporating the mistake into the artwork, 2) accept that the artwork includes a mistake you cannot fix, or 3) cheat after the art has been created by photoshopping pictures to "repair" the mistake.

An art critic wrote that in photographs of his works of art, Goldsworthy "captures the infancy stages of creating them, the majestic full bloom of the mature piece, and then the decline and demise that comes with time. ... We as the audience get to see his humanness in his successes as well as his failures."

Shilling wrote that he finds satisfaction in that "perfect moment where everything comes together and a sculpture lights up as if at its pinnacle moment and has come alive." There is even greater joy, he explained, when the artwork created with ephemeral materials "reaches its zenith in only a short moment before beginning to degrade and returning back to nature from where it came." "All that effort to see that magical moment before you simply just leave it behind," Shilling added. "There is no way you can possess or own that moment beyond that time so you have to simply leave it and let it go and that is very liberating indeed and an allegory for the transience of our existence."

More on this story, with photos and videos of snow and sand art, can be found at these links:

[Finland Snow Art: Locals Create Giant Pattern on Golf Course. *BBC*](#)

[Interview: Artist Walks in Snow All Day to Create Giant Geometric Patterns by Foot. *My Modern Met*](#)

[Man Creates Amazing Snow Art With Footprints \(Video 1:00\). *Huff Post Live*](#)

[One Man's Walk in the Snow Creates a Giant Masterpiece/Short Film Showcase \(Video 6:03\). *National Geographic*](#)

[How This Guy Makes Amazing Sand Art/Obsessed \(Video 9:18\). *WIRED*](#)

Applying the News Story

As we consider what our faith teaches us about the transitory nature of creation, including human life, we reflect on the meaning of work and beauty. We also consider how connecting with nature and art, in solitude and in community, can nourish our souls.

The Big Questions

1. What do you think motivated God to create the universe and everything in it, if it is true, as orthodox theology teaches us, that God is self-sufficient and does not need anything or anyone else to be complete?
2. Have you ever worked hard on a project or creation, only to lose all traces of it, due to a natural disaster, computer crash, or some other mishap? How did you feel about the loss in that moment? Were your feelings about the loss the same years later? If not, what, if anything, has changed?
3. Why create art if it doesn't last?
4. What is the appeal of a beautiful flower, a haunting piece of music, a sunset, a bite of a delicious piece of fruit, an evocative fragrance, that you experience for a brief moment in time, but which soon evaporates or fades away?
5. What do transitory objects and experiences tell us about ourselves? How might they impact our spiritual journey? How does our faith speak to the transitory nature of our human experience?

Confronting the News With Scripture and Hope

Here are some Bible verses to guide your discussion:

Isaiah 40:6-8

A voice says, "Cry out!"

And I said, "What shall I cry?"

All people are grass,

their constancy is like the flower of the field.

The grass withers, the flower fades,

when the breath of the LORD blows upon it;

surely the people are grass.

The grass withers, the flower fades;

but the word of our God will stand forever. (For context, read 40:1-10.)

The prophet proclaims that God's promise to forgive, comfort, and rescue his people, is based on the eternal, sure word of God. That word is placed in direct contrast with the grass that withers, the flower that fades and people who are just as fragile as grass and flowers that are here today and gone tomorrow (see also Matthew 6:28-30).

Biblical writers often remind us of our creatureliness and mortality in passages like Genesis 3:19 ("You are dust, and to dust you shall return") and Isaiah 64:6, 8 ("We all fade like a leaf ... we are the clay, ... the work of your hand"), while emphasizing that God is our creator in Psalm 100:3 ("It is he that made us, and not we ourselves") and Isaiah 64:8 ("Yet, O LORD, you are our Father; ... you are our potter").

Humans are not only distinct in our physical mortality from God who is eternal spirit (John 4:24), but morally inconstant and fickle, in contrast with the righteous nature of God.

Questions: What is that "word of God" that will stand forever saying to us? How do you react to that word? What emotion does that word evoke in you?

Acts 17:24-25, 28-29

[Paul declared,] "The God who made the world and everything in it, he who is Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in shrines made by human hands, nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all mortals life and breath and all things. ... For 'In him we live and move and have our being'; as even some of your own poets have said, 'For we too are his offspring.' Since we are God's offspring, we ought not to think that the deity is like gold, or silver, or stone, an image formed by the art and imagination of mortals." (For context, read 17:22-31.)

When Paul visited Athens, he debated with philosophers and religious people, proclaiming the good news about Jesus and the resurrection (vv. 16-21). He acknowledged that the Athenians were extremely religious, even erecting an altar to an unknown god, to be sure they had all the bases covered, just to be on the safe side (vv. 22-23).

In the tradition of the prophets (e.g., Isaiah 44:9-24), Paul makes clear that the Creator of the world bears no similarity to idols that are made by mortal artists and placed in shrines made by human hands. God is not made of material we can manipulate, manufacture, or control. God doesn't need us; rather, God gives life and breath to all sentient beings.

Question: Think of something or someone you have admired or desired, only to be disappointed by that thing or person later. How might contemplating the transitory nature of things and people, and the eternal nature of God, provide you with needed perspective, helping you know where to place your trust?

James 4:14-15

Yet you do not even know what tomorrow will bring. What is your life? For you are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes. Instead you ought to say, "If the Lord wishes, we will live and do this or that." (For context, read 4:13-17 and 5:1-9)

Here James speaks to those who boast about their plans to travel and make money (4:13), and to the wealthy who place great stock in their riches and luxurious possessions (5:1-3, 5), which he says have rotted, rusted and been eaten by moths. Our lives are as wispy as mist, as inconsequential as a shadow, lasting "a little while" before they vanish. What matters is doing the right thing (4:17), which means treating other people the way they should be treated, not using them for personal gain or pleasure (5:4, 6).

We are called to await the coming of the Lord with humility, patience and hope, knowing that he will return as Judge (4:16, 5:7-9).

Questions: How might knowing that Jesus will return as Judge affect your own decisions and behavior, if at all? How might knowing that Jesus will judge wrongdoers, who may have escaped punishment or correction in this life, bring you some measure of comfort and hope?

2 Corinthians 4:7, 16-18

But we have this treasure in clay jars, so that it may be made clear that this extraordinary power belongs to God and does not come from us. ... So we do not lose heart. Even though our outer nature is wasting away, our inner nature is being renewed day by day. For this slight momentary affliction is preparing us for an eternal weight of glory beyond all measure, because we look not at what can be seen but at what cannot be seen; for what can be seen is temporary, but what cannot be seen is eternal. (For context, read 4:6-18.)

Paul speaks about the transitory nature of our physical bodies, which he describes as clay jars or earthen vessels, in which "the light of the knowledge of the glory of God" shines in the face of Jesus Christ (v. 6).

In his earlier letter to the Corinthians, Paul had written about how God deliberately called people who were not wise, powerful, or of noble birth, choosing instead the foolish in the world to shame the wise, the weak in the world to shame the strong, the low and despised in the world, things that are not, to reduce to nothing things that are, so that no one could boast in God's presence, unless they boast in the Lord (1 Corinthians 1:25-31).

The theme of God's power working in and through weak people pops up again in 2 Corinthians 12:9-10, where Paul exults in his weakness, because through his weakness, the power of Christ is more operative and obvious.

Question: How might art such as the ephemeral examples in the news article encourage us by reminding us both of our own fragility, and also of God's greatness?

For Further Discussion

1. Take a moment to meditate on this poem by cricketer and missionary, C.T. Studd: [Only One Life](#). What are you doing with your life that might have a lasting impact? What might prevent you from devoting 100 percent of your time to doing those things?

2. In 2013, artist Sonja Hinrichsen mobilized over 60 volunteers at frozen Catamount Lake in Colorado to create intricate swirling patterns over several miles of virgin snow. For Hinrichsen, the transformation of a familiar snowy topography into a piece of art gives collaborators a chance to experience nature in new ways.

"The creative process ... changes our perception of the landscape and accentuates the beauty and magic of the natural environment, and thus inspires awe and appreciation for art as well as for nature," she writes. "I deem this important -- especially as modern society becomes increasingly disconnected from the natural world."

While other artists generate designs on computers for others to execute, the way an architect provides a blueprint that contractors are expected to follow, Hinrichsen gives volunteers general ideas and illustrations, without detailed instructions, so they can tap into their own imaginations as they develop a communal work of more unpredictable art.

Given the choice, do you prefer a "paint-by-number" or a less structured approach to life? What appeals to you about your preferred approach?

3. Comment on this, from nature artist Andy Goldsworthy: "We often forget that *we are nature*. Nature is not something separate from us. So when we say that we have lost our connection to nature, we've lost our connection to ourselves."

4. Think about this, from artist Richard Shilling: "As many of us become more disconnected from nature and more obsessed with technology and live more and more stressful lives, the need to have a time-out and reconnect back to nature and our inner selves becomes even more urgent and necessary."

How much do you relate to this statement? What role, if any, should your church take in helping people reconnect to nature? Explain why this fits, or doesn't fit, with your understanding of the mission of the church.

5. How is God an artist? In what sense are we a part of divine art?

6. What do you know about the Buddhist practice of creating and ceremonially destroying sand **mandalas**? Can you identify any practices, rituals or festivals in the Bible or in the history of the church that remind us of the impermanence and mortality of human life? What is the value of such practices?

Responding to the News

1. This might be a good time to seek out local artists within your church or in the larger community, to explore ways you could collaborate to help people reconnect with each other and with nature through an art project of your own choosing.

2. As we observe Ash Wednesday and enter the season of Lent, you may find it meaningful to reflect on the meaning of your own mortality, when you see petals drop from a flower, spot a grey hair in the mirror, feel an unfamiliar ache in your body. What are human beings that God is mindful of them, mortals that God cares for them? (Psalm 8:4)

3. You may wish to meditate on how God chooses imperfect, ordinary people to accomplish extraordinary things as you listen to [Earthen Vessels \(3:19\)](#) or [Weight of Glory \(4:00\)](#).

Prayer

Creator, we bless your name for the amazing universe you made, that constantly reflects your immortal life and splendor through mortal beings and matter. You filled the world with unnecessary sights and sounds, scents and tastes that fill us with wonder and excite our imagination. Thank you that every day is a new adventure because of your creativity and love. Amen.