

# Elizabeth Vail and Sonya Dyer: Growing Edge Sermon

## Growing Edge Sermon

2-18-96 by Elizabeth Vail and Sonya Dyer

### Elizabeth Vail's statement:

Good morning. This sermon grew out of a discussion with Sonya on how to make the Growing Edge Fund visible to the community. As you know our process of sermon making is often organic. This sermon is about the relationship between the individual and the collective (my word for church).

The scripture from Matthew 17: 1-9 is the transfiguration. The disciples were on a growing edge. They needed help in becoming changed. A commentary on the lectionary says

*"Occasionally in our lives some of us have had profound spiritual experiences which tilt the mundane universe for us, which transfigure it for us, which help us to see everything with new eyes. Such experiences do not last but they leave us changed. So it was, I think with the disciples who witnessed the transfiguration. For a few moments they saw the whole world changed with God's grandeur. The grandeur faded – but Jesus did not leave them."*

Perhaps Jesus was on a growing edge cocreating with God/spirit to form a new world. Perhaps part of his warnings not to tell others after a healing and after the transfiguration had to do with the creative process ... to put labels on the product of the creative process is to stifle it. Also he had clues that the disciples would not be going through the whole journey

that he was, but they were important in a way even he was not quite sure of.

Seekers is fed by the creative process of celebration circle as it creates a new liturgy every season. There is risk and accountability in this process for the individuals. This risk and production is against the majestic rhythm of the church year where we celebrate the "central mystery of our faith: the life, death, and resurrection of Christ Jesus. The foundation is the Lord's Day, The first day of the week, on which we recall Christ's triumph over sin and death. Each year there are two Christ-centered cycles: Advent-Christmas-Epiphany and Lent-Easter-Pentecost. In each cycle, days of preparation (advent and Lent) are followed by days of celebration (Christmas-Epiphany and Easter-Pentecost)."1. Why am I telling you what you already know? Creativity requires structure and limits to exist. Our liturgical year is the structure and Celebration Circle's liturgy is the creativity. I often think of the worship service as a large concave mirror that embraces us all and gives us back to us visually.

Part of the concept of the Growing Edge is to provide structure to the creativity among us. Some of the creativity is directly related to the church but other creativity does not seem to be. It is in this arena I want to raise our consciousness. The individual matters. It is through the individual creativity and faith journey that our collective candle of faith is reignited.

Over the years in the artist group I have been fascinated at the power that exists in an individual choice and the collective hearing of it. Discovering one's want is a solitary journey. To claim it publicly is another struggle because then one is under the authority of what that dream implies...time, money, study, being changed and the tensions with existing activities. Since the artist group's task is to hold one accountable for what one says one wants to be there is a lot of waiting while the creativity is perking. Is this artist

really trying? Occasionally there is celebration when there is fruit but sometimes nothing seems to be going on and we have to trust. I believe it is this aspect of faith in self and faith in others that is so critical to being church. This involves an awareness of one another.

The Growing Edge is an example of this aspect of being church. As a body we give to the recipient but we also receive. We are given an example of a faith journey which relights our candle of faith. What kind of structure would help us to do this better? In Roy Barber's case where he understands theater he has been able to give us a clear idea about his growing edge and we thank him. Not all of us could do this so we need a structure of accountability to accomplish this.

Part of being church is creating church with these variety of ways of being together...structures for the institution. We use the word community for institution. How boring we say to talk about institution building but the opportunity to create the institution while under the authority of it is unique among churches and one of the gifts we offer Christendom.

Listen to our Seekers call and note all the action words in it. *"We believe that the divine Word of God comes anew within a community that struggles with the issues of our day in light of the Gospel. We build our structures for worship, mission and community life on this belief: to help us attach our individual lives, missions, families and occupations onto the sturdy framework of God's Word."*

This sermon grew out of the need to be more intentional about a structure to help the individual and the corporate interface. We have procedures for the individual but holding the corporate accountable is not as readily understood.

The Growing Edge Fund was started in 1979 by Hollis and me. It was close to the formation of Seekers which was 1976. In the old Church of the Saviour I had been part of an artist group

called the Alabaster Jar with Jimi Lou Mason the sculptor. The split up of Church of the Saviour into 6 churches had meant the end of that group. Mary Claire Powell urged me to call another one into existence so in 1978 with her support I issued a call. Mary Claire Powell, Alan Dragoo, Marcia Brewington and Randy Walker responded. Mary Claire was claiming photography as her medium and was having shows of nude men and women...Jesus being one of them. She wanted to publish a photo book. I was talking to Hollis about how to get Seekers to undergird the arts with money. He said don't ask them for the money...give it to them. I was surprised at this idea but it has proven to be correct as Seekers has claimed the concept as its own. It started with \$1,000 in 1979 and has grown to \$3,000 this year.

Responding to the Growing Edge call means naming a dream or want and owning it but then one must create a structure to make it happen. School does this but we are calling on the Growing Edge recipients to design their own structure. This is a trial and error process and sometimes failure points us in another direction so failure is part of the creative process and so is waste.

Mary Claire Powell was the first recipient, producing the book "The Widow". She shared an interview with her mother, Ruth Powell, in her home. I couldn't begin to tell you where this came from but it was a lovely simple story in pictures and words of a woman as seen by another...her lesbian daughter. We have a copy on the altar. We have some other things resulting from Growing Edge recipients. Emily Gilbert going to a monastery in New Mexico and Gary Robertson going across the country to teach self drawing in the National Parks. I will post the recipient list upstairs...each person has a story of a journey to tell ...ask them. One does not have to "need " the money to ask for the Growing Edge fund...it is the willingness and desire to take the risk and be accompanied in the creative process. There is support in this but also accountability. The

procedure for application is in your worship folder.

I want to share a dream which may belong to all of us in some way. After this Sonya will share some ideas about the Growing Edge Fund.

My dream was in August 1994 which was right after the vote of Church of the Savior to dissolve. I was gallery hopping with a couple in this area and suddenly became lost. I could not understand how I could be lost since the street sign said 21st and Q but the buildings were not familiar. I see a very beautiful old building with a large size monogram on the side. I say to the couple " I am going to join a group studying architecture some day". Some people are sitting on the grass picnicking and have a lion beside them. Some pink and blue touches are somewhere. I have eye contact with the lion. He seems so benign for being so potentially dangerous.

I have worked with this image in trying to paint it this year. I have decided the lion represents courage. We don't use that word very much but in many ways faith is a form of courage. I have decided the lion needs to be bright orange and the grass bright green. I don't know why but I trust there is a reason.

As I said earlier faith in self and faith in other is important to be about our call to be church.

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## **Sonya Dyer's Statement**

For Liz and me this sermon has been an example of our personal growing edge co-creation. We are also very aware that Seekers is corporately engaged in very specific and challenging ways in our collective edge work. We are about creating and re-creating ourselves as church. We are about a faith journey of co-creation with the spirit of God.

Several growing edges are presenting themselves and more will no doubt be suggested over time. When we speak of a corporate growing edge it does not mean that all of have to be in lock step but rather we are speaking of ways we can each take risks, use our gifts, and give expression to the new directions and actions that call our community into the future.

As Liz said a few minutes ago we are gifted by being in a church ... an institution ... that can recreate itself at the same time we have the structures, theology and authority of an institution we already created to hold us in its framework.

Accountability is one of the important understandings we try to embody in our common and personal lives as Seekers and that we have built into the description of the Growing Edge Fund. This is a word that is not comfortably understood by many and may have some meanings out of our past that implies more judgment than affirmation;. For me it is a very positive and empowering concept. At its best accountability offers encouragement and help in being about what it is we know we want to do and be. It is about caring and shared commitment. It is about belonging to each other in a stance of trust. It means receiving the gifts of pastoring and of prophecy from another. Mary Hunt in her sermon last week spoke about prophecy being present in each of us waiting to be given. I firmly believe this and think we have tried to build our common life on the premise. Then we are discovering our growing edges we may need the prophet to challenge us...To name what they see, to invite change and to speak the confronting word. Our community as well as we as individuals need an embodiment of the accountability. It is important to consider how might we be more intentional about holding the community to account for its growing edge? This is part of the opportunity for new creation we are offered as we live together into the future. We need to hear and receive from each other those insights, challenges and the caring that

builds trust as we make decisions about our future.

The Growing Edge Fund has been a part of our budget for the last 18 years. That experience has taught us several things that can inform our corporate process.

- The importance of being attentive...believing in a faith journey.
- How to take the risk of trusting self/spirit and entering into the unknown.
- The importance of being willing to be unclear about outcomes.
- Taking the risk of asking community to be with the process.
- Being open to being changed, being named and blessed.
- Receiving and accepting our authority.

We have a wealth of knowing about what it takes to grow at the edges.

The scripture this week spoke about listening to the spirit's voice and trusting in that voice to give direction. Those who apply for the money to be on their edge seek to do that. Others of us in the community can be about that same kind of listening for the community and with those individual whom we fund. By affirming the importance of this idea in our budget we are also accepting the challenge of companioning, loving and holding accountable those who make these requests.

Liz and I are eager to strengthen this dimension of the Growing Edge so that the invisible can be made more visible, the faith journey of each of us can be given more expression in our common life.

This is a call to fuller participation in this process of individual and corporate co-creation. We invite you to consider whether you would be willing to be in relationship with an individual who receives Growing Edge funds as they make this growing edge journey or if you would like to join us

in our small group receiving requests and affirming those who meet the criteria. Speak to Liz or me. This is also a call for you to find ways to participate in holding the community to account for living on its growing edges and help us name and bless them.

"Occasionally in our lives some of us have had profound spiritual experiences which tilt the mundane universe for us, which transfigure it for us, which help us to see everything with new eyes. Such experiences do not last but they leave us changed." The word of prophecy in the Growing Edge process offers all of us the possibility of this kind of transfiguration.

1. Revised Common Lectionary, 1992 for the United Methodist Church