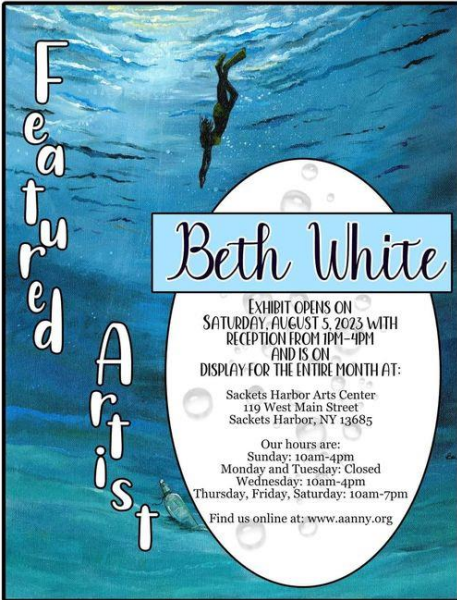


“Eight Wonders of Life: Visual Design”
Exodus 25:10-16

On the way home from a trip, we stopped by a community-based art center in Sackets Harbor. The August featured artist who spoke to us was Beth A. White who turned out to be a Presbyterian.



What was fascinating to me was how she took discarded ordinary items and turned them into beautiful pieces. Things like old guitars and wooden folding chairs found in the basement of her church were turned into amazing pieces which she sold as a benefit for her church community.



Art helps to transform our vision from just looking at things from the small perspective of the ego to connect us to the immensity of life. Art evokes a sense of awe in us. Dacher Keltner writes, "Viewing art activates the dopamine network in the brain. Visual art can provoke us to reimagine reality... Think about the last time you encountered a piece of visual art that made you feel awe, perhaps a painting, or a photograph, or temple's patterned carvings or cathedral's vaulted apses and stained-glass windows, or a climactic scene in a movie. As you look at the source of visual awe neurochemical signals move from your retinas to the visual cortex in the back of the brain, which begins to construct the rudiments of images out of the angles of lines, patterns of light and dark, early signs of shape, texture, and color. In this first stage of perception, art reveals visual patterns we may not be aware of in the moment, and this can initiate feelings of awe...Viewing art activates the dopamine network in the brain...Art empowers our saintly tendencies. One impressive study, which involved more than thirty thousand people in the United Kingdom, found that people who practiced more art, like painting and dance, and viewed more art, for example by going to museums or musical performances, volunteered more in their community and gave more money away two years after the study's completion."

Art is highlighted in our Bible story for today. It is about the creation of the Ark of the Covenant which was to be the sacred symbol for God's presence, an ornate box where the tablets of the Ten Commandments would reside. Let's watch a short video explaining the significance of this box: <https://youtu.be/oNpTha80yyE>.

For the building of the tabernacle and the ark of the covenant, the Israelites were asked to make very generous donations. Then they were given very specific instructions for the measurements, design, and materials of the ark. Let's listen to them in Exodus 25:10-16

¹⁰ They shall make an ark of acacia wood; it shall be two and a half cubits long, a cubit and a half wide, and a cubit and a half high. ¹¹ You shall overlay it with pure gold, inside and outside you shall overlay it, and you shall make a molding of gold upon it all round. ¹² You shall cast four rings of gold for it and put them on its four feet, two rings on one side of it, and two rings on the other side. ¹³ You shall make poles of acacia wood and overlay them with gold. ¹⁴ And you shall put the poles into the rings on the sides of the ark, by which to carry the ark. ¹⁵ The poles shall remain in the rings of the ark; they shall not be taken from it. ¹⁶ You shall put into the ark the covenant^(b) that I shall give you.

Why all the extravagance of gold? After all, these people were nomads wandering in the wilderness. They didn't even have a building to house such a box. They only had a tent. Yet, we know from the history of humanity and our own experience how important art and beauty are for our sense of wonder and for experiences of worship.

The people of ancient Israel were leaving behind the sophisticated and amazing temples of Egypt where art was spectacular and awe inspiring. They needed their own spaces for worship. While Moses experienced God in the beauty of nature from the glory of a mountain to the power of a burning bush, he received a vision to have physical objects which the people can take with them to remind them of the presence of God. This was not to say that the presence of God was limited to one place or object. Yet, there is power in physical buildings and objects to remind us of the presence of God. The materials used for the building of the ark of the covenant remind people of the journey they had taken out of Egypt. It was supposed to be beautiful to help people experience that sense of wonder. Gold in the Middle East and around the world is seen as beautiful. The items that were contained in the ark: The bread (manna) of heaven, the staff of Aaron, and the tablets.

The invitation for us today is to allow visual design to transform our perception of reality and of God. Let art speak to you to nurture your sense of awe. Most of us forget how to draw and paint as we become adults, but the good news is that we can be recipients of the gifts of art, whether it is something that we see in the stained glass of a church or just the drawings of a child.

I would like to invite you today to use mandalas for a time of meditation. Let go of your fears about your abilities to draw as you don't have to share this with anyone. You can also just use the side of the sheet that has a pre-designed mandala on it and just color it. We will use the instructions from a website called "Mandalas for the Soul."

Mandalas are an ancient design that symbolizes the universe. These geometric designs typically feature a series of concentric shapes or repetitive patterns that lead to an inner point of focus. Modern mandalas come in a variety of shapes, from circles to stars, hearts, flowers, and animals. Making your own personal mandala can be both fun and enlightening as you strive to represent your characteristics, values, and desires in this artistic form.

Before You Begin...

Take the time to consider the reason for creating a personal mandala. The layout and design of your mandala will vary depending on your purpose. A simple mandala can be made with repeating shapes that you find appealing, but for a more meaningful mandala you will want to choose images and shapes that represent your goals or desires.

Consider the meaning of some common symbols to determine if they belong in your mandala.

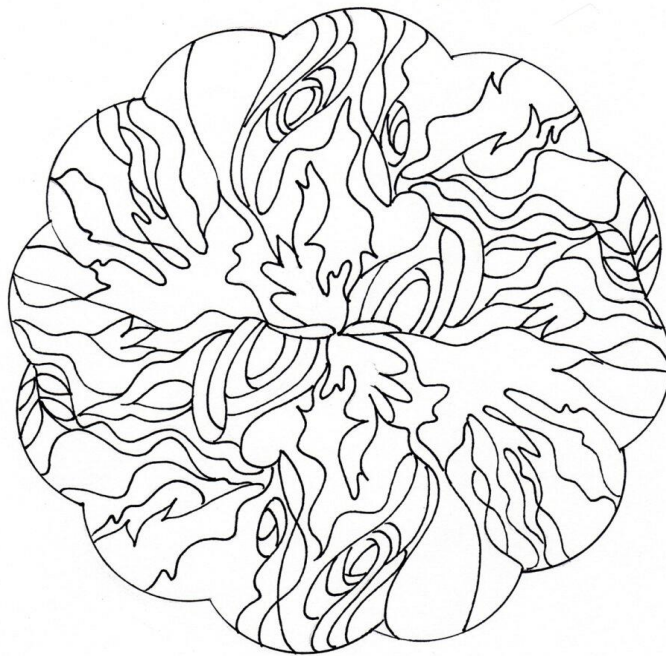
- **Circles:** Circles can represent eternity or the infinite. In religious terms, a circle symbolizes unity, wholeness and protection. It can also symbolize the sun.
- **Triangles:** Triangles represents the trinity – either the Christian trinity of the father, Son and Holy Ghost or the new age trinity of body, mind and spirit. Triangles with the point

facing upward may symbolize spiritual growth, while those with the point down represent the physical world.

- **Flowers:** Flowers typically represent life and renewal.
- **Leaves:** Leaves and vines often represent eternity or rebirth.
- **Hearts:** Hearts are the universal symbol of love and compassion.

To draw your own mandala, you will need a piece of drawing paper (computer paper will do, but it won't hold up as well), a soft lead pencil, a ruler and a compass or a stencil of circles. If you do not have a compass, you can use cups, bowls, a roll of duct tape or other round household object in the size you desire.

1. Trace a large circle onto the paper. Typically, you will want to make the circle as large as possible as this is the outer edge of your mandala, but you can make it smaller if you wish.
2. Draw a faint horizontal and vertical line through the circle dividing it into four equal quadrants. You can divide it further into 8^{ths} if you prefer. These lines will serve as guides as you add your designs to the mandala and will help you determine the exact center of your mandala.
3. Mark the point where the lines intersect in the center of the circle. This is the center of your mandala.
4. Draw a small circle approximately 1-inch from the center dot so that the dot is in the middle of the circle.
5. Repeat the procedure drawing concentric circles spaced 1-inch apart until you are within 2 inches of the outer circle. This will create a wider circle around the outside



of your mandala.

Pentecost Mandala by Rev. Dr. Judi McMillan