



Questions, part 1

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Do you ever come across appointments on your calendar that make no sense? A couple weeks ago, I found “worship/key” written down for a Monday evening. I had not a clue what that meant. It was obviously important: I wrote it down in ink. In the end, I had to let it go, believing that if someone really wanted me to be somewhere, they’d let me know.

This week, while going over some notes, I found a question that I’d written on a largely empty piece of paper. The question was obviously important: I’d written it in ink. Even more revealing (because, truth be told, I hate writing in pencil), I’d left a lot of space for the answer. So, in the hope that someone really wants me to answer the question and will let me know, I share it with you:

What is written on our canvas?

An unanswered question. I’m hoping we can answer it together. Notably, it is phrased in the collective. I didn’t ask what is written on my canvas, but rather our canvas. So, whatever this musing is, it involves all of us.

I wonder what is *already* written or painted on our collective canvas. The Presbytery has a long history, with all its ups and downs. Part of our canvas has been written in indelible ink, so that we won’t or can’t forget. Perhaps part is tentative or aspirational, written in pencil (though not by me, of course). Because a canvas is designed to be displayed, what we write about ourselves is a bit like our public persona. It’s the answer to “who do we say we are?”

Of course, the interpretation of a painting is subjective to the observer. In other words, our claimed identity is not always what people see.

When I first started with Milwaukee Presbytery, I heard that you were forward-thinkers, ready to take on a challenge and try something new. You were ready to name and tackle injustice. That was part of what we wrote on the canvas. Good, and we always need to ask: is that still true? Do we want to be the presbytery that writes General Assembly overtures and organizes vigils or protests? Will we undertake an audit of where racism interferes with our ministry? How should we be structured, so the Presbytery is a relevant, meaningful point of connection?

I envy that you will undertake the transitional process of establishing who you have been and who you are. That is good, exciting work. In that process, we claim (in indelible ink) those qualities and values we hold dear, and we adjust to how we’ve also changed or reprioritized or let go (taking an eraser to the pencil marks). We might find that the canvas has bare places that are ready for our creative pen or brush. You are going to have so much fun!

