

May 30, 2017

Dear Grace Church Family and Friends,

Recently, I was biking along the National Mall, when I decided to ride home, taking the Metropolitan Branch trail, which follows the Metro line from Union Station to Silver Spring.

Not far past the NoMa-Gallaudet station, the trail took a sharp turn to the left, and suddenly, I came upon a group of artists, painting on the large, concrete retaining wall of the tracks. The artists were each working on their own section of the wall, and they all had their own distinctive styles. But, their paintings blended together into a mural that added so much beauty to the path.

As I continued toward home, I couldn't get the artists, or their work, out of my mind, and I was reminded of another artist, whose work I'd once seen.

Mary Tillman Smith was an African-American folk artist who spent her entire life in Mississippi, working as a housemaid for other people, and, while she always enjoyed drawing, it wasn't until she retired that Mary began painting. For a canvass, Mary used sheets of corrugated metal that her son had left lying in her yard, and, on those sheets, she painted animals, Biblical themes, and simple human figures with their arms raised to heaven. Her work was big and bold and vibrantly colored, and she displayed her paintings in the yard, which was next to a busy road, so before long, Mary was something of a celebrity. Eventually, Mary's artwork was shown around the world and collected by the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City and the Smithsonian American Art Museum here in DC. When asked why she painted, especially given her late start in life, Mary said: *I did it to brighten up the yard, and please the Lord.*

That is why I thought of her when I saw those artists along the bike path. They were doing the very same thing Mary wanted to do: *brighten up the yard and please the Lord.* And, their efforts, their art, made my day.

It's a good goal for all of us – making someone else's day – and so, this week, that's what I'll be focused on doing, by listening to Mary Tillman Smith's advice: *brighten up the yard and please the Lord.*

See you in church,  
*Andrew*