

## **“Pathways to Creation”**

Danielle Webber

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N.B. – These sermons are made available with a request: that the reader appreciate that, ideally, a sermon is an oral/aural experience that takes place in the context of worship – supported and reinforced by readings, contemplative music, rousing hymns, silence, and prayer – and that it is but one part of an extended conversation that occurs over time between a minister and a covenanted congregation.

### Reading

The following is from the author, editor and knitter Robin Romm – this is an excerpt from the short story “Creation Myth.”

“I learned to knit from my grandmother, a reticent and withdrawn woman with dyed blond hair and piercing blue eyes. Her emotions generally ran the gamut from flatness to worry; I rarely saw her show abandon or excitement. But when I was about nine, she sat with me during a visit to Eugene, Oregon, teaching me to cast on, knit and purl. The speed at which I learned and the dexterity of my small, nimble fingers opened a window to another grandmother, one I hadn’t known before. As I sat next to her, working on a wobbly square of blue acrylic, she exhibited a rare joy and pride. ‘Look,’ I remember her crowing to my mother, her daughter-in-law the trial lawyer, holding up the lumpy ‘doll blanket.’ My mother nodded; totally not her cup of tea, knitting. She went on reading a brief, planning a vacation, tolerating the visit with her husband’s difficult family. But her lack of enthusiasm didn’t dampen my grandmother’s. ‘Look at how even your stitches are!’ she said. ‘So tight and straight. You’re a natural, better than I am already!’

It felt novel, nice to see her eyes shining. The act of creating something had dispelled her sadness, and I made a mental note - one that I didn’t understand yet, but that I would revisit later in life.”

### Sermon

The first time I picked up a pair of knitting needles I would have been 9 or 10, and yes, it was my grandmother who taught me how to cast on, knit and purl. But when I went home from that summer vacation I too was not able to maintain the process of making knots with strings and sticks. Well I could make knots, but they didn’t look the way they were supposed to and knitting was more frustrating than enjoyable. Although every time I went back to my grandparents’ house, or they came to visit me I would sit down beside my grandma while she made slippers for one of the many people who received them, or perhaps she was knitting cotton dishcloths, and I got swept up in the mesmerizing rhythm of her needles. I would soon be asking for her help once again to learn how to knit.

Nothing ever really stuck though. Until I was 17. I started dating the man I would later marry, and we spent a lot of time with his family in the early days of our relationship. His mother, Linda, is a knitter, and although she refused to teach me, she did give me a book and took me to a store to pick out yarn and needles for my first project. She helped me cast on for the first time, but the rest of my talent came from that old knitting book; it would have been published in the 1960s, the pictures were black ink drawings, and it had a price stamp of 75cents on it. Knitting was still really frustrating

for me, although Linda told me that my tension was excellent, and I could tell the difference between a knit and purl stitch, I really struggled with dropped stitches, twisted stitches, extra stitches and unintentional decreases. I am not certain where my determination came from, maybe it was in the joy that I had every time I wore my grandmother's slippers, or perhaps it came from the beautiful sweaters, vests and shawls that Linda wore, but I refused to let go of the needles this time around, I was definitely going to become a knitter.

The first real project that I decided to knit, after mastering the dishcloth and toque, was a cardigan. The pattern was for a very basic sweater, with the fronts overlapping one another, and a tie to close them around your waist. I went to a craft store and bought discount yarn, in a medium grey colour, I borrowed the right sized needles from Linda, and I cast on. After 9 irksome months, attempting to read the pattern, read the material that I was creating, and finally trying to sew all of the pieces together, I ended up with a sweater. Well more accurately, I ended up with a house coat. A house coat large enough to fit my partner. Frustrating.

But, it has been 12 years since that first house coat sweater, and I am still knitting. I have made socks that I have to encourage to get around my heel, I have sweaters with sleeves too long, and I have shrunk a wool sweater that was one of my first experiences of cabling. There have been a lot of frustrating moments along the way, but the passion that I have for knitting is able to outweigh all of that frustration that it causes me.

The short story that I shared from earlier, by Robin Romm, goes on to tell about her pathway of knitting, and how creating knitted items in order to counter the sadness in her life time and time again. From the terminal illness that took 10 years to take her mother's life, to a baby sweater that created solace during a downsize at her publishing house, she writes about how "knitting can be a creation in the face of sadness."

Another artist, Julia Cameron, who is well known for the book that she wrote called *The Artist's Way* argues that "Creativity is [the Universe's] gift to us, and then our using the creativity is our gift back to [the Universe]". Julia Cameron created the book *The Artist's Way* in the early 1990s after teaching the material for a decade in New York City, and then sending the materials around the world. This material moves through 12 chapters, each to be accomplished over the course of a week, to help people recover from their inner critic, to recover their sense of power, and possibility, and to recover a sense of faith in themselves. In one of the introductory chapters Cameron states about the 12 steps that the process will follow similar paths as a rollercoaster – stages of giddiness will be followed closely by anger, grief and hope. She says "this choppy growth phase is followed by a strong urge to abandon the process and return to life as we know it... People are often tempted to abandon the work at this point."

And so is the pathway of creation. Something that frustrates you, but can create a counter balance in the face of sadness, and grief. And often something that tempts people to give up on their aspirations. And it is times like this that the power of creativity, the power of creation becomes too much to manage. How do creators overcome that sense of abandon, the peaks and valleys of the rollercoaster, what has many times been called the Birthing Process of creation? How is it that we move from frustration to creation, like I did? How do we allow our passion to take hold of our fear and grief and rage to manage something creative, like Robin Romm wrote about?

One suggestion Cameron has is to play with our creativity, rather than work on it. This concept is not new to the western, or North American world. Everything that we do is work whether it be the job that earns us an income, cleaning up the house that we live in, or sitting down at our computers to answer emails and proofread the minutes from our last committee meeting. It seems only natural that after work is over and we have completed our housework, and church work, that we can spend some time working on our creativity. Cameron argues that this way of looking at our creativity is not helpful, and I would agree. In order to encourage her students to play with their creativity she requires an artist's date once a week, where the reader spends 3 to 4 hours each week taking themselves on an artistic date. This could be to go to the craft store, or an art gallery, taking a lesson in pottery throwing, or spending a morning exploring Pinterest for new inspiration. If we can learn how to find the joy of creation, the joy in creating something from almost nothing, then maybe we can harness some of that power that makes creation such a mystery. Cameron also states that moving through the chapters in her book is a spiritual exercise, one that is done to create alignment with the creative energy of the universe. Connecting her readers to that mystery, maybe.

Karen Hering, Unitarian Universalist Literary Minister, says the same thing in her book *Writing to Wake the Soul: Opening the Sacred Conversation Within* saying that “the human gift of language is born of the desire to connect... [and] religion too, in the root of the word and in its best practice, is about what binds us together, one person and one moment to the next.” Hering's book, although not an invitation to recover, is a chance to discover our creativity through writing about theological themes. Touching on this same idea of creation and grief, Hering argues “our grief, displacement, and disillusionment are real if often unnamable; and the joy, love and wild appreciation that sometimes arise in the midst of deep grief can be just as unspeakable,” and that our need to create stories out of such chaos is a basic human impulse. I felt such a need – to understand why I was able to find creative joy amongst all of the frustration in my knitting. And so when, in the spring of 2012, the young adult group that I was a part of decided to lead a soulful sundown, or a circle worship, reflecting on our spiritual practices, I knew I was going to write about knitting. We wanted to share with the congregation how spiritual practices had helped us to overcome difficulties in our lives, and allowed us to embrace the challenges of being a young adult. About my spiritual practice I wrote: “Knitting has the ability to distract my hands while focusing my mind. I am able to go inward and meditate on an idea, or concentrate on a speech. And although I can knit without paying attention, and it allows me to watch television or sit still as a car passenger, I also listen better when I have knitting in my hands. But one of the most satisfying times is when I turn my attention inward. The fact that I take my knitting everywhere helps me find ease and balance in an unknown world. Knit through everything. Through a mess of emotions, or a struggle with logic. Knitting helps me face many challenges in my life. But I have also learned very strong messages from knitting. Methodically winding a knotted mess into a new fresh ball of yarn shows me that I can work through anything. Twisting cables, creating elegant lace, stranding together multiple colours and turning a heel flap on a sock all give me a sense of completion and wholeness. This inward attention is where I find and nurture my spirituality. I can mend, and make. Reshape and redefine. The things that I find important, the things that I don't understand, the things that I struggle with all get worked over in my brain while the yarn is worked over in my hands.”

While working on this sermon, I had a knitting project in my lap. Whenever my fingers weren't moving across the keyboard, they were moving across the needles. I was working on the ankle of a sock for most of the time. But when I needed to create the heel I moved to a less complicated project, a bed blanket for my 4-year-old nephew. Being able to have that yarn running through my hands allows me to get in touch with a different side of my creativity, allowing the opportunity for a

different creation. The power behind this is still a mystery to me. Whether your creation is knitting a sock, creating a story, making music, cooking a grand feast, or writing a brief – know that the universe needs your creations. There are many paths to creativity, and many different ways to create. What will your path teach you? What will you do with that call of creation?

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