

Weaving

Romans 12

My friend Marnie is a weaver.

With patience that I can only dream of,

she sits at a loom and moves the shuttle back and forth, back and forth,
one painstaking row at a time.

And slowly, slowly, a work of art emerges,

its pattern created by the colors that Marnie chooses,

its texture created by what it is she selects to weave into it:

wool spun thin, or a ribbon, or strips of cloth.

Marnie was confirmed here back in 2006,

my daughter's year, my daughter's friend.

We knew she had an eye for artistry even then,

the ability to see beauty and create beauty.

We never would have guessed that in years to come,

she'd be a weaver at the Plimoth Plantation in Massachusetts,

dressed in the costume of an early settler,

patiently weaving while people came to watch.

This is the shawl that she would wear –

which she wove herself.

Marnie's work even ended up on the pages of the New York Times,

as they spotlighted local crafters. We were so proud.

I've learned a little about weaving just by witnessing Marnie's creations.

I've learned enough to know that a piece is created by warp and weft.

The warp is the yarn that runs lengthwise –

the foundation of the piece, the undergirding of it all.

And the weft is what is woven in, back and forth, back and forth –

changing colors and textures,

patterns emerging.

The warp is what is constant –

the weft is what the artist chooses to weave in, colors and textures,

patterns, designs.

Yesterday was our Women's Retreat,

and the theme I choose, which I'm sharing with you today,

was weaving.

To each person there I gave a little practice loom –
a piece of thick cardboard, really, on which they could wrap
the warp – those strong, sturdy pieces of yarn that hold it all together .
And then, with a mountain of yarn to choose from,
each woman wove in their weft –
the colors, the textures they chose.

We weren't doing this just to have fun with arts and crafts,
although, in truth, we did have a ton of fun.
I'd chosen the theme of weaving because,
it seems to me, our very lives are something woven.
Our lives, each of them,
are warp and weft intricately entangled,
with a pattern and beauty uniquely our own that emerges day by day,
year by year,
created by the One who weaves each of our lives together.

And that's what I asked the women gathered yesterday to reflect upon.

I asked them first to think about what is the warp in their lives,
and yes, it is a funny word for a non-weaver to have to say over and over
without giggling a bit.

“What is your warp?” does sound pretty silly.

But that’s exactly what we spent a while reflecting upon.

If the warp is all those strong vertical threads that run beneath,
that hold the piece together,
often invisibly, what is that for us.

What holds us together, through all and in all,
what is our constant, our certainty, our deepest truth?

“My mother’s love,” said one woman,

“My father’s”, said another.

“My sense of my own worth” said yet another.

And we listened to one another, and honored those constants,
those great truths and surest certainties that have grounded our lives.

And then I said that beyond all that,
even deeper than the deepest loves we experience,
even more sure than the surest thing we know,

is the God who is ever-constant.

In all our lives, I said, it is God who is the warp,

I actually said the warp beyond all warps --

and yes, that is a theological statement that I have never spoken before.

Beneath all and in all

is this greatest of Loves,

a Love that is ever-patient with us,

a Love that never lets us go.

Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,

the Psalm says, you are with me.

If I take the wings of the morning and dwell at the farthest reaches of the

sea, even then you will find me.

Love never ends, wrote the Apostle Paul.

Nothing in all creation can separate us from the Love of God, he said.

That is our foundation, our sure thing,

the thread that runs through all our lives:

this assurance that we are loved.

Ever, always, without condition,

Loved.

And not from afar, not loved from some distant place.

No, we are loved by one who never leaves us alone,

who walks alongside us always, ever,

in this life and beyond.

This is our foundational truth, what we know to be true.

And with this truth threading the loom,

we weave a life.

Together with God, who is the great Weaver,

we create a life.

And just as a weaver chooses different threads,

different colors, different textures,

our lives are woven through not with one color but many.

The brightest of colors for those times when all feels as it should be,

deepest blues for those times when sorrow weaves its way into the pattern.

golden sunshiney cords of joy,

and thick gray yarns when the sun is clouded.

Our lives, each one of them,

is a pattern emerging from the Weaver's loom
one day at a time,
its colors and textures changing and shifting
as we encounter life
as we change our lives
and life changes us.

A class begins, a friend is found,
a child is born, a job is lost,
our heart is full, our heart is broken,
all seems well, all seems crazy –
all of these, woven into the pattern that is our life, our life only.

And in all of it, the hand of the Weaver God is at work,
creating a pattern even when all is a tangle of threads,
creating beauty even when what is woven in is knotted and rough,
taking even fragile, broken threads and weaving strength.

And throughout it all,
underneath it all, God's love abundant and unending,
holding our life together, holding us together.

This is what we talked about yesterday,
as we wove together.

But we also talked about was our deep yearning
for our lives to be woven *together*,
for us to be in community.

All of us who sat together yesterday in that retreat center,
weaving and talking, listening and weaving,
all of us were no different than the women I was with in India six weeks ago,
the ones I told you about last month.

Those women come together to learn tailoring --

We started those sewing classes so that women of little means
could develop a skill that would bring them some income.

What we discovered was that what they most wanted was to be together.

To sit together, sewing patterns spread out before them,
and to talk.

About in-laws and children, about hardships and hopes,

about what was difficult and what was joyful.

They wanted to be together, to laugh together and to be one.

And we, gathered with our little cardboard looms, yesterday,

we too wanted to be together and to be one.

And isn't that why we're all here, in this place, right now?

We're here in worship together because something within us called us here,

called us into community and connection,

called us into this place to sit near and sing with each other

and pray each other's prayers.

We're here because, woven into our very fabric, is a thread of longing

for connection.

And it is a holy longing.

A few weeks ago, the Wall Street Journal published an essay

by the two doctors who head up the Harvard Study of Human Development,

a decades-long study of, well, humans. Us.

For 85 years, Harvard has tracked a group of people,

and now their families, to try to learn the secret of life.

Or at least, to figure out what it is that creates happiness and fulfillment, what it is that makes life joyful.

And in this essay, the doctors revealed that when they interviewed all those folks,

and asked them about joy, and contentment ,

more than anything else,

more than career success

or any of the marks of achievement that we think of,

what actually created truest health and happiness was *connection*.

Connection, to others.

Connection, to people they cared about and who cared about them.

Connection and community.

What happens here in church is that connection.

What happens here, in a family of faith,

is that God, who is the weaver of each one of our lives,

weaves us together into a community,

a community of love.

As I look out from this pulpit, I see so much beauty –
each of you a tapestry of gorgeous threads and yarns and textures woven
together,
each of you absolutely uniquely yourself and beautiful in it.
And what happens here,
together, is that we are all woven together into One.

That's what church is, that's what community is,
and we need it, we *need* it.

Woven into the fabric of each life is a thread of yearning
for community and connection;
it is a yearning that God gives to us,
a holy yearning to be with one another and open to each other,
to find the divine in each other,
to feel God's presence through another.

We come here to be woven together as one.

Way back when, our ancestors in faith felt exactly the same way.
They too knew that they were called into community,

that they were called to be church *together*.

That's why I had Denise read to you from Paul's letter to his Christian friends in Rome, two thousand years ago.

He was celebrating what church looks like,
what it's here for:

We who are many are one body in Christ he said.

We have gifts that differ, he said, but we are one body.

And so, he said, we rejoice with those who rejoice,
we weep with those who weep.

That's why the last thing we did together yesterday on our retreat
was to create one more fabric,
one more weaving.

We might not be written up by the Times for our craftsmanship,
but what we expressed together is true,
and is true for all of us here right now.

Draped over there by the baptism font is what we created:
one solid fabric shot through with different colors,
different fabrics and designs.

One solid fabric holding it together –
the God who is constant, the God who is love,
the God who is strength and who is hope.
And all of us woven together as one,
held together by that Love and that Hope.
(And yes, by a number of staples along the edges –
like I said, we did our best.)

That's church.

That's connection, that's unity, that's the body of Christ as one.

That's us.

This is where we with all of our individual stories
our unique fabric,
come together to be woven as one.

The Weaver God makes of us a glorious tapestry,
and together we are beautiful.

Together we are beautiful.

Amen.