

2 Corinthians 1:1-11
Revised Standard Version

Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and Timothy our brother.
To the church of God which is at Corinth, with all the saints who are in the whole
of Acha'ia: ² Grace to you and peace from God our Parent and the Lord Jesus
Christ. ³ Blessed be the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the God of mercies and God
of all comfort, ⁴ who comforts us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to
comfort those who are in any affliction, with the comfort with which we ourselves
are comforted by God. ⁵ For as we share abundantly in Christ's sufferings, so
through Christ we share abundantly in comfort too. ⁶ If we are afflicted, it is for
your comfort and salvation; and if we are comforted, it is for your comfort, which
you experience when you patiently endure the same sufferings that we suffer. ⁷ Our
hope for you is unshaken; for we know that as you share in our sufferings, you will
also share in our comfort. ⁸ For we do not want you to be ignorant, brothers and
sisters, of the affliction we experienced in Asia; for we were so utterly, unbearably
crushed that we despaired of life itself. ⁹ We felt that we had received the sentence
of death; but that was to make us rely not on ourselves but on God who raises the
dead; ¹⁰ he delivered us from so deadly a peril, and he will deliver us; on him we
have set our hope that he will deliver us again. ¹¹ You also must help us by prayer,
so that many will give thanks on our behalf for the blessing granted us in answer to
many prayers.

This Sunday, the first Sunday of Lent, we begin a worship series on Creative Spirituality. My understanding of Creative Spirituality in relation to the journey of Lent, Holy Week and Easter is that the activation of our creative spirits grounds us for what is coming and sustains us through what will be and prepares us for avenues of service which will find us. In my mind this is true of the Lenten calendar and any season in which we might find ourselves.

Quilting is the first of Creative Spirituality topics Susanne and I settled upon. I have quilted (believe it or not), and I found it one of the most calming experiences of my college years. Bethel College (Ks) created a quilting room for students and faculty during the January intensive term. Jon Pauls, a long time friend from my home town and a pre-med student, and I made regular trips to the quilting room. Being a surgeon in training his stitches were neat and tidy. Being a student of history and theology, I was a bit more expansive in my stitch work. What struck me, in addition to the needle, is the calm which descended upon the room of those present-- stitch; talk as you feel led; quietly work as needed; respect what is shared; respect for your task at hand; holy quiet reverence.

Today we will hear stories of those who quilt, knit, tie and sew. I asked four quilting persons to offer reflections on questions that I posed to them:

- How does quilting or the other needle arts shift things for you internally / spiritually / or emotionally?
- Secondly, how does this experience shape your engagement in the world?

I do not want to weary you of the many puns which might come from such an arrangement, but I can not resist. I have sought to “piece” together the various reflections in a cohesive way. I have sought to “sew” the contributions together in a way that holds. I have sought to tie it all together in a manner worthy of a NPMC worship service. In the end I have sought to offer a window of comfort and “comforters” that impact people and the world for the better. Follow the “thread” and all will be well. I begin with a reflection from Edith Krahn.

Quilting and making comforters brings joy for me. It’s the feeling of comfort that evolves from knowing the finished product will bring comfort and warmth regardless if it is for family or MCC.

The first quilts I made were for our daughters when they were teenagers. I had sewn clothes for them since they were young and had a lot of leftover fabric. I cut, pieced, sewed blocks together and quilted and produced a very plain quilt for each of them. They loved reminiscing of what was made from certain fabric

and when they wore it. As they use their quilts to warm guests in their homes, they can share their stories!

A feeling of satisfaction!!

The Hershel Mennonite Church ladies along with the Herschel U.C.W. and community ladies have gathered every winter to make comforters for about 25 years! Working together and recycling donated fabric was a unifying feeling, making hundreds of comforters for U.C.W. and MCC.

A feeling of satisfaction!!

Making fancy quilts has been more of a challenge for me. Through the years, quilts have been made for both granddaughters with some frustration when patterns didn't fit right! Making a long jean comforter for Karin's fiancée helping keep him cozy and our relationship warm! This past year our great grandson received his "I Spy" quilt, which was a joy to make.

A feeling of satisfaction!!

Feelings of satisfaction are there when I sew tops for MCC comforters and reflect on how the comforters will warm the recipient with God's love and comfort and I receive the blessing!!

- Edith Krahn (Feb 27, 2022)

I began with Edith's reflection because it so often references comfort and comforters. Nine times in our scripture reading from 2nd Corinthians does Paul use the term "comfort". This morning I opted for the scripture to be read in the RSV because it translates the Greek word as "comfort" rather than "consolation" (NRSV). Clearly, the Corinthian congregation was in need of comfort. Most of us are in need of comfort. People suffering various afflictions need comfort. Comforters offer warmth and consolation. A reflection from Hilda Patkau gives additional insight into the way in which sewing and quilting and knitting mediates comfort.

I was asked by Patrick to reflect on what impact quilting has on my spiritual life. I started quilting years ago when I became involved with MCC. Over the years I have tried to go once a week to join with a few other quilters. Quilting helps me to look at the way we learn about ourselves and our values. It connects me to find meaning and purpose in life.

When I quilt, many threads of fabric have been woven together in a design and texture. As thread holds together the layers of the quilt, our spirituality holds together the layers of our life. "Threads of time" and "patches of life" connect us with our past and give meaning to my own life.

My values, beliefs and attitude create a sense of who I am. When quilting I feel part of a rich history of other quilters who have suffered through the same sorrows. We have been woven like patchwork into a design and texture of values unique to us.

Each stitch creates a pattern that when finished makes for a beautiful created quilt. The movement of the needle, the rhythm it generates, creates for me a soothing time as I slowly turn my mind to the basics of life. What I hope is that the pattern I follow when quilting will be like the pattern in my spiritual development.

When quilting with others we connect with one another. We realize that we all go through much the same difficulties and suffering, some more than others. Lasting friendships are formed even after some have had to quit quilting due to age or other difficulties.

- Hilda Patkau (Feb 25, 2022)

The names we carry and who we have become are a by-product of the Great Quilter who has lovingly tended our pattern. God, Christ, the Holy Spirit, the Saints, our spiritual family here and now—all of them tending to us. We are being formed and crafted by the best of those we call the communion of saints. We are and are becoming the handiwork of Christ's quilt which can bring us comfort and will bring comfort to our family, friends, faith community and world. Some may question, though, how the ragged sections of their lives might be again sown together. Edith and Hilda alluded to this Divine recycling plan, and Pat Sawatzky touched upon it as well. She wrote,

The making of quilts is a creative time. We choose from colorful piles of fabrics to create something that is useful and has a purpose. Much of the fabric would not be used otherwise so it is a way to salvage from what may just be discarded. The time spent in sorting, planning, cutting and sewing the pieces together is a solitary time but it is also a time for reflection and time to say prayers. A time to count the blessings of family, friends and mentors. Prayers of thankfulness for health of body and mind so that I am able to continue this work; thankfulness for what we have in food, shelter and clothing. Saying prayers for those who will be receiving these comforters. There is enjoyment and fellowship as we get together each week to assemble the quilts and tie them to complete the quilt. We feel this is a way that we can support the work of MCC. There is a sense of accomplishment as we admire the finished product and count the number completed. We do talk about where the comforters will be sent and we hope that as they receive them, they will know that we are thinking about them and praying for them.

- Pat Sawatzky (Feb 22, 2022)

Aspects of our torn and worn lives are being reclaimed by the One who is the Great Quilt Maker of the universe. The scraps of our lives are being pieced together by the Holy Spirit. We are being sewn into something new each day and

year. We become a new creation pieced together from our past. We are being dedicated and commissioned to offer comfort in a world with far too much suffering and far too many tragedies. This is the quilting project God and the people of God.

The final reflection I have comes from Alma Elias and touches upon the creative process of quilting and the gift that it is. She wrote,

Engaging in the creative process with fabrics and patterns...aligns me with The Creator, especially when it is done in love for the recipient, love for the process, and just for the joy of creating. It connects me to me as I discover more about who and what I really am, what my preferences are and what my own unique style and colour sense is. Creating is a joy and I believe we were meant to be joyful. As an elementary school teacher, I was often surprised to receive impulsive hugs from students after an art class. Why was that? They thanked me. For what? I was just doing my job and yes, my heart was in it but I believe they acknowledged the joy of learning to know themselves better and loving the process of creation. As fellow creators we feel a kinship with our authentic selves and with The Creator! Then when we lovingly give away our creations, as many quilters do, we share something of who we are.

- Alma Elias (Feb 21, 2022)

I conclude this pieced together and crudely sewn sermon with a reflection of Patty's grandmother offered to a group of women quilters in her country church outside the hamlet of Tofield, AB (Salem Mennonite). "Finally, when the comforter is all complete, stitched and bound, it is ready to be purchased and claimed and used. What is the purpose of a comforter? We put it on a bed as a cover and to bring us comfort. God comforts us to make us comforters ourselves. This comforter with its four corners spread over the bed reminds me of God's love covering the four corners of the earth. Not a person is left uncovered or un-provided for as far as God is concerned. I may slip out from under the comforter or toss it back saying, "I don't need it," but it is not the comforter's fault if I get cold! Neither is God to blame if I or anyone rejects [God's] provision of love. We as comforters belong to Christ and when he comes to claim the finished comforter for himself – what a wonderful time that will be." Deceased grand-mother Roth has the final word. Amen.

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