

Threads

[Deuteronomy 34:1-12](#)

[Psalms 90:1-6, 13-17](#)

[1 Thessalonians 2:1-8](#)

[Matthew 22:34-46](#)

If you know anything about knitting or crocheting, you know the yarn is all connected. There may be different colors and patterns, but it is all intertwined. I learned that the hard way. My grandmother had crocheted me a beautiful sweater, and one day I noticed a loose piece of yarn. As you can imagine of a small child, I pulled on it, thinking I would break it loose. Instead, I opened a huge seam that split the thing practically in two. My poor mom was devastated! And I was equal parts sad and mesmerized. I had no idea that could happen. I was only trying to make it better, but I did not know how essential that loose bit was to the whole thing.

I've thought about that sweater all week, because today's readings are about being one thread in something far bigger than ourselves. They also show us two opposite ways we mishandle the threads that run between us.

As has become our custom, let's begin with Moses. At the end of his life, he climbs Mount Nebo, across from Jericho, and the Lord shows him everything: Gilead to Dan, Judah to the western sea, the whole sweep of the land. "This is the land I swore to Abraham... I have let you see it with your eyes, but you shall not cross over there."

That seems unfair, and we want a reason. We reach back to his earlier failure and blame him. But that isn't what the text does. It doesn't belabor it. Instead, it tells us Moses was one hundred twenty years old, in full health, and that Israel never again had a prophet like him. His life was complete, even though the work was not finished. The promise was never about only Moses' life. Moses was faithful to a promise he would not personally complete, and he got to stand at the edge of his part of the story and see where the story was going next.

Then the Lord buries him, and no one knows where the grave is to this day. I don't think that's an oversight. Israel couldn't build a shrine and spend the next generation looking backward. They mourned for thirty days, honored him, and then Joshua led them across. Moses had laid the foundation, and now the people needed to walk on it.

Psalm 90 holds the same tension. Before the mountains were brought forth, God was God. We are grass that flourishes in the morning and fades by evening. You'd expect the psalm to conclude then that our work is therefore insignificant. Instead, it asks, "Prosper the work of our hands," and "Let your glory be shown to their children." Our brevity doesn't cancel our work. It sets the terms for it. What we do matters because it becomes the ground for those who come after.

This week, the Episcopal Church wrestled with that very thing. Its leaders decided to sell The Episcopal Church headquarters building in New York City, where the church has been housed for more than sixty years. The President of the House of Deputies, Julia Ayala Harris, opened with these words: "The church was never promised permanence; it was promised the presence of God." And Bishop Rowe asked whether we are willing to relinquish forms we love "so that something can rise we may not live to see," and he called **that** genuine stewardship: to build the church **we** will not live in.

We know that feeling here too. Precious ministries started, tended, and then released. Even now, as we celebrate our own Stewardship Sunday, we are dreaming of what God may begin next in this place. So, here is where the sweater comes back, because I think we mishandle threads in two ways, and I suspect every one of us does both, depending on the day.

Some days we hold on to our stretch of the yarn so tightly that nobody else can pick up the needles. The ministry, the committee, the way we've always done a thing, the liturgy, the building. We love these things, and we should. But some days we treat our part as the whole sweater.

Other days we're the child with the loose thread. "That's old. That doesn't matter anymore. Let's just pull it and make this better." And we don't know what that stray bit was holding up. The first forgets that the story doesn't end with us. The second forgets that it didn't begin with us. Moses, buried by God, honored but not enshrined, shows us the narrow way between these extremes.

Now, that can all sound very theoretical, but Paul comes along and makes it practical. In First Thessalonians, he reminds the church that he and his companions did not simply deliver a message and move on. They had been beaten and shamed and jailed in Philippi, and still, he says, they were gentle among the Thessalonians, like a nurse tenderly caring for her own children. Then comes verse 8: "So deeply do we care for you that we are determined to share with you not only the gospel of God but also our own selves, because you have become very dear to us."

The word for "dear" is *agapētoi*, from *agapē*, love. It is the language of affection, not just duty. And the way the sentence reads, this love had not always existed in its current form. It grew out of shared work, over time. Being a thread isn't something we do alone. It's being woven in with particular people. Paul wasn't the center of the story, and neither were the Thessalonians. They carried it forward together, and the gospel moved through the connection between them.

Which brings us to Matthew. A lawyer asks Jesus for the greatest commandment, and Jesus gives the two strands that hold every other thread: love God, and love your neighbor. On these, he says, hang all the Law and the Prophets. The Law sets the covenant obligations, and the Prophets call out what happens when we lose sight of the relationships those obligations were meant to serve. Jesus isn't discarding anything. He's showing them how it was woven together.

Then he turns the question around. Whose son is the Messiah? "David's," they say. And they're right. David mattered. The whole covenant story mattered. But then Jesus asks

how David, speaking by the Spirit, can call him Lord. “Son of David” isn’t wrong. It’s incomplete. God’s future grows out of the story we’ve inherited, but it isn’t confined to what we already know how to expect. The Pharisees had held the old yarn so tightly, for so long, they couldn’t see the next row.

So here’s the good news, and it’s resurrection news. If it all rested on our grip, we would be right to despair. But the Lord of David is the same Lord who walked out of the tomb, and he is the one holding every thread. Our unfinished work isn’t lost when we lay it down. The Psalmist says, “from age to age, you are God.” And God’s purposes are shown from one generation to the next.

And remember Moses, who stood on Nebo and could not cross? In Matthew 17, Moses appears on a mountain in the very land he never entered in flesh, standing beside Jesus, talking with him. God did not forget his faithful servant. What God shows us from the mountain, God protects and keeps.

So, friends, I’d like to leave you with two questions to carry out the door. First: What are you holding that God might be inviting you to hand off? A role, a tradition, a seat at the table, something you helped shape...? Second, especially if you are the one picking up something someone else is laying down, what loose thread are you tempted to pull, in this church, in your family, in your neighborhood, that may be holding up more than you can see? Every one of us will pick up some projects and lay down others. That’s not failure. That’s how a sweater gets finished by many hands.

And we do this at the table. Here we take Christ into ourselves, the one in whom every thread is held, and we are made part of his life, cuff and sleeve together, inseparable. Here the bread is passed from hand to hand, through generations, from those who came before to those who will come after.

May we be a people who give ourselves fully to the part we've been given, who honor the work of those who came before us, and when its time, lay down our part gladly, trusting that Christ's work through us will live beyond us.