

“God’s Fabric / Our Thread”**Rev. Maeve Hammond****Psalm 71:1-6 | Hebrews 12:25-29****24 August 2025**

I want to share a story with you about an item that is near and dear to me, and I’m actually wearing it right now. It’s this long, blue, linen dress, which I wore when I officiated my close friend’s wedding in North Carolina last year. I was so thrilled to preside over their union before their loved ones. Just that fact alone makes this dress meaningful to me, but there’s another piece to it: I made this dress. I picked out the fabric from a store in Cambridge, bought the matching thread, found a pattern I liked (with pockets!), traced, cut, stitched it together, and voila! Those once-flat yards of fabric sitting on a shelf transformed into a fully-functional, fully-wearable garment. Some of you already know this, but I learned to sew by hand when I was very little—think three, four years old—a little too young for a kid to start playing around with sharp needles and temptingly-eatable-but-not-edible buttons and other notions, but I digress.

I’ve always been fascinated by clothes and how they were constructed. When I was little and my mom was at work, my grandparents watched me in their home. They had a loose, kind of latch-key approach, so I had a lot of time to myself to do whatever I wanted. And, I spent a lot of that time simply observing and trying to understand the world: in the garden looking at flowers and watching butterflies, coloring for the whole afternoon in the living room, and sitting in this little adjoining room beside my grandparents’ bedroom. Now, this room was great because its closet was full of these vintage items and clothes. I was too short to actually pull them out and play dress-up with them, but, still, I loved to just look at them, smell them, and feel their textures. I also had, you could say, a connection to my grandparents’ unfinished basement. It was similarly *filled* with vintage things, with only a little walkway on the cold concrete floor to get through it all. Not only that, but it was dingy and had the tiniest slivers of windows known to man at the top of its concrete walls. Literally, it was the perfect spot for me to develop asthma—which I did. But, I loved it. I remember that I couldn’t wait to go down to the basement. It felt like such a

treat—better than chocolate cake and French toast. I would sit on the cool, hard floor and just *be—just marvel in*—in all of this weird, vintage, and outdated items, all of this history of generations past. In spite of (or perhaps because of) the fact that these items had ostensibly been cast off, discarded, and left uncared for, I was drawn to them.

These memories are very formative for me. I had a turbulent childhood and was often in the center of the chaos and big emotions of the adults around me. It's no wonder that I found so much peace and solace around my little things, taking claim of my own time. In a lot of ways, I am still that little kid finding myself very comfortable alone, in quiet, with the things and interests that make me happy, curious, and analytical. I don't sit in the middle of someone's basement and go through their stuff anymore—usually [joking]—but I still have an affinity for textiles and the intricacies that transform them into garments with a history and meaning of their own.

In the early stages of the pandemic, I was in graduate school, and one of my classmates shared a story with me over Zoom. He had taken up sewing and was in the process of making quilts in memory of his late mother, using scraps of fabric and shirts from her collection and wardrobe. I expressed to him how beautiful I thought his project was and how I had been interested in getting back into sewing. Then, one day soon after this conversation, I opened the front door to go out and get the mail, and what did I find at my feet? My classmate had sent me a brand-new Singer sewing machine. I was so floored and so awed by his kindness and generosity, as well as his support: he really believed in me and wanted me to follow something that could bring me, and even others, joy. It created this sense of connection between us. Whenever someone asks me how I got into sewing, I always, always bring it back to the story about how a friend from grad school sent me a mysterious package one day....

Crafting can create a shared bond that tips the scales from the everyday-secular to the sacred-holy, wherein we can more readily and openly receive the grace of God, the peace of Christ, and the comfort of the Spirit. If you don't believe me, I invite you to look at this next slide [change the slide]. When I consider where I have felt God's presence at this intersection of 1)

making, 2) meaning, and connection, I'm reminded of the National AIDS Memorial Quilt. During my last year of college, panels of the National AIDS Memorial Quilt came to Davidson College. It was just massive. I could feel the love of God and the love of the quilt-makers radiating from these pieces. All the grief, all the joy, everything lived in this quilt. Stories and histories became immortalized by interconnected thread and fabric. What you see on the screens is just a screenshot from the National AIDS Memorial website; if you go online, you can find much more. The quilt bears memory of the loved ones we have collectively lost to AIDS. Each of the 50,000 panels of the quilt is unique. As a whole, "it honors more than 700,000 lives lost to AIDS since the first cases were reported 40 years ago" (National AIDS Memorial 2025). Nearly 110,000 names have been sewn into the quilt so far.

We can trace the stories and histories of human connection and identity through the threads that make up our garments. Think about this: all of us have a relationship with clothes we wear. For example, how many of us gathered here have made our own Halloween costume? [Raise hands] How many of us gathered here had hand-me-downs from cousins, siblings, or relatives? [Raise hands] How many of us gathered here had family members who 1) had a dedicated sewing spot in their home and 2) actually made clothes for us, by hand? [Raise hands] See?

An item is never just an item. It contains the hands, the markings, the memories of the humans and the living beings who created it, passed it down, treasured it, even trashed it. Let's use my blue, linen dress as an example, working from seed to garment. A natural fabric like linen comes from the ground. It starts as a flax seed, is grown and nurtured, and then harvested. Remember, we're talking about a natural fiber—not synthetic ones made of petroleum/plastics like polyester. Teams of people then process the flax from plant to these long, spun, and woven sheets of fabric. More people will work to design the color of the fabric and dye it. Fabric is often shipped around the world during this process until it lands on a shelf in your shop or online store of choice. A shopkeeper or company sells the fabric. A designer

creates the pattern you use to make the garment out of the fabric. Then, the sewist (the person who sews it) puts all of these pieces together in a culmination of the plants, soil, water, machines, human hands, hearts, and minds that it took to collectively create this piece. Now, putting this garment in 1) my history, 2) the wide, vast, and ancient history of fabric production and wear, and 3) your own histories, you'll realize that this blue, linen dress, your favorite winter coat, or your great-grandmother's handmade quilt is just one item of many that connects all of us in both its simplicity and its intricacy beyond time, space, and place.

[Pause]

When I first was preparing for today's sermon, I really wanted to stick to our lectionary readings. I sometimes pride myself on being, what I call, a "lectionary purist," meaning that I enjoy the challenge of approaching texts that can seem disjointed, unrelated, or thematically confusing. Like trying to understand how a garment was made or how to read an unfamiliar pattern, I want to engage all of Scripture with a curious and open mind, as well with a faithful steadfastness and determination. That being said, sometimes even pastors have to pivot. So, yesterday evening, I took a look at my sermon, and the pieces just weren't coming together. I felt that the Spirit was leading me towards something else that I couldn't quite construct from our lectionary readings. I tried to concentrate on this theme that kept coming up for me: our interconnected threads in the great fabric of God's kingdom.

With that theme in my heart, two passages presented themselves. The first was Psalm 139, "you are the one who created my innermost parts; you knit me together while I was still in my mother's womb." The second was the Gospel of Luke's recounting of Jesus's death and burial in the twenty-third chapter. These two texts span the spectrum of human experience. The divine hands of God knits us into being in the thirteenth verse of the psalm, only for time to flash forward to the time of the psalmist's death. In death, God's hands are once again at work as our Creator and Maker: the fifteenth verse reads, "My bones weren't hidden from you when I was being put together in a secret place, when I was being woven together in the deep parts of the

earth....” In the twenty-third chapter of Luke, God is present as Jesus is caught between life and death on the cross: “Abba,” he cries out, “into your hands I entrust my life.” The linen shroud wraps Jesus’s dead body—a sacred and textile marker of passage from life to death. In all of the accounts of Gospels, the authors specifically mention that Jesus’s body is wrapped in linen—a fitting symbol of simplicity, care, and connection.

From the beginning of life to its end and everything in between, we find an interaction between the presence of God and God’s people in Scripture. Adam and Eve clothed themselves when they realized they had disobeyed God in Eden. Jacob puts on a garment in order to trick his father, Isaac, into giving him a blessing that was actually intended for his twin brother, Esau. Moses’ face shines so intensely after talking with God on Mt. Sinai, the Hebrews made him wear a veil. Scripture zooms in on the clothing of Esther and Naomi during pivotal moments of their ministries. John the Baptist notoriously wears a tunic of camel hair and a leather belt to visually represent his asceticism to his community and followers. At his transfiguration (or, at the moment where God called Jesus), Christ’s robes became radiant. The hemorrhaging woman in need of spiritual and medical relief reaches out to the hem of Jesus’s cloak. In moments of intense grief, the people of God rend their clothes into shreds and put on sackcloths to show their mourning. The prophets and Jesus remind us to “clothe the naked.”

God’s fabric / our thread. God’s kingdom on earth / our lives. As imperfect beings who can only understand (or try to understand) a fraction of God’s universe, we often turn to stories and metaphors to give us language for our relationship with God—in a way that we can understand and share with others. Let’s consider that God is this brilliant weaver and artist, and we are the inseparable and necessary shapes and lines / stitches and curves that make up God’s intended design. Now, with any crafting project, things can certainly go awry and deviate from the pattern and the plan. Perhaps our needle gets dull or caught in the tapestry backing. Perhaps we run out of the color we were using and have to substitute it for something else that’s just not quite the same. Perhaps we weren’t paying enough attention or the light was too dim,

and we ended up making a mistake or sewing over the same piece twice. Perhaps we got a little too overzealous and excited and started sewing on someone else's piece and neglected to take care of ourselves and our own.... But, then, we stand back and examine all of our work: the threads that mark the course of our lives, the way that our paths criss-cross and connect with others, in all of our shared histories and collective imperfections. And, the core of what we see—beyond imperfections, chaos, mistakes, and change—we know this to be true: we are interconnected beings, inseparable from the presence of God. We are the threads in God's great fabric, which stretches beyond time and finds our stories irrevocably intertwined.

Friends, hear the good news: Scripture shows us time and time again that we were meant to be woven together with each other and with God, interdependently so. Each of us is shaped by our family, social, and cultural histories. Each of us is shaped by the thoughts, love, care, and humor of others. Each of us has a role in reshaping the world, so that God's kingdom may become ever clearer to us on earth as it is in heaven.. And, most importantly, each of us has been thoughtfully and carefully created by God, who stitches us into this complicated, beautiful, and mysterious tapestry. And, isn't that a marvelous thing, really? May we go forward, praising God for our interconnection and adding our stitches to this vast work of art that is God's glory and grace. Amen.