

Sermon Transcript  
"The Revolution of Creation"  
Rev. Sarah Napoline  
Delivered at First Parish Church in Weston, MA  
Sunday, September 28, 2025

When was the last time you made something  
with your own two hands with your voice?

Y'all are cheating with your body.

How are you choosing to transform things in the world  
instead of conforming to it?

We each come to church for a variety of reasons.

Perhaps we are unsettled  
or grieving seeking guidance while raising children  
facing a crisis or, or longing for c connection in an  
otherwise isolated life.

Ultimately, we are drawn here  
because we seek spiritual nourishment and inspiration.

Well, okay, I I guess maybe I could be wrong.

Maybe some of you didn't come here to learn and grow.

Um, maybe some of you are all set with that.

So, um, show of hands, who has it all figured out?

Who feels like they know everything they need to know about  
God and spirituality, religion, ethics?

No. If anyone does come see me  
after church, I have questions.

No, no. We're grown adults. We've lived decades.

No one has it figured out.

I asked that question to the denominational affairs  
committee earlier this week.

And even our wonderful longtime members,  
some who've been coming for over half a century confess,  
they are still searching.

They're not experts because that's what we do here.

We ask questions, we wonder, we explore and we grow.

We're drawn to church

because of an imperative drive within humanity.

It's a universal truth

that transcends cultures and generations.

We yearn to make meaning of our lives

and the universe all religions our constructs

by humanity to help us understand our world

and to connect with the divine.

The format and the structure of church is actually intended

to help us connect with God, to listen to

transcendent music, to enter into quiet meditation,

in prayer, to reflect on truths with readings

and sermons, to open our hearts by helping others

and connecting in fellowship and community.

Religion is one of the most fundamental tools we use

to grow our souls,

but the purpose of religion is to point us toward God

and to help us find those kinds of tools

and methods that get us there.

I am a big fan of communal worship on Sunday mornings,

unsurprisingly, but there's

so many spiritual practices to nurture the soul.

Jeff talked last week about the power of the Sabbath  
and setting aside time for rest.

Many people utilize meditation and prayer. I practice yoga.

Join me on Friday morning.

Nature's another common touchstone for spiritual connection.

It is good to set aside specific time in your schedule when  
you can to, uh, connect with the holy.

But there are a myriad of other ways to weave  
spiritual awareness into the fabric of our lives.

It's all a matter of intentionality and mindfulness.

We must seek out the things that inspire, excite,  
and nourish us and not just the traditional religious  
or transcendental practices.

It's in our hobbies, our passions,  
and our curiosity that grow our hearts wider.

A family friend recently shared a story about his two  
daughters earlier this month.

His sixth grader was working  
with a tutor when his older daughter,  
a high school sophomore, came over  
and ended up teaching the tutor.

This friend is a brilliant high achieving  
and he was rightfully proud of his whip smart daughter.

But I found myself wondering,  
when had she last seen her father make a mistake?

When had she seen him stumble, try something new  
or learn from failure?

When had she seen vulnerability rather than

polished success?

I wonder what would happen if they enrolled in a ceramics class together, both starting from scratch, both being humble, covered in clay, fumbling and laughing and learning side by side.

Because children learn as much from seeing us struggle as they do from seeing us succeed.

I wonder what would happen if this ambitious daughter entrenched in the high pressure college and career track experienced failure.

That question made me think about my own life.

When do I let myself stumble and learn?

Personally, I've learned to embrace both mistakes and growth through the creative arts that I love.

I was always a curious and artistic child.

I worked at a children's, uh, studio, art summer camp when I was in high school and college in my late teens.

I learned to knit and I have since expanded into colored pencil drawing, watercolor, and most recently needle points, various kinds.

I'm not an expert in any of them.

You can, you can tell, but the process is deeply nourishing.

I follow instructions or just my own inspiration.

I try new techniques

or I stick with things that I know well.

I pick projects that are challenging

and others that are relaxing.

Regardless of the medium or the project,

I find the creative process itself to be a bomb for my soul,

a connection to my authentic and sacred self.

The creative and curious child within me.

The practice of creation, whether knitting, woodworking,

cooking, it isn't just a hobby,

it can be deeply spiritual.

Kurt Vate said to practice any art, no matter

how well or badly is a way to make your soul grow.

So do it. Theologian Brian Bantum

describes the experience of building his own bookshelves

rather than buying them.

He said the real value wasn't the furniture itself,

but the mistakes along the way

because those mistakes shaped him into someone more patient,

adaptable and attentive.

That has been my experience with art and creativity.

Adults generally don't get as many opportunities

to learn a new hobby or skill simply for fun.

Learning something new, especially as an adult,

is liberating because it reminds us we don't have

to be perfect.

And it reminds us that finding joy is a reward

and a gift in itself.

I can make a mistake in my knitting

and leave a twisted stitch knowing

that the imperfections are part of

what make any homemade object special.

Or I can make a mistake

and decide to rip out the stitches, fogging it back

to start over and try that new technique again.

Otherwise, that so's gonna look like a inner tube

No matter how well

or how badly I continue practicing, exploring,

experiencing and growing.

Bantam says these lessons aren't

just about the things we make.

They're also about the people.

We become people who can attend to the imperfections

in ourselves

and in one another who can adapt when materials don't quite

work the way we expect them to, who are invested in things

as more than what can be consumed

and discarded who move through the world a little slower.

Our lives are busy and full

and there is so much that is not of our own making

that leaves us just trying to find a few minutes of peace

or ease in a day.

But there is a way that the corporatization

of everything in our life grooms a fear of mistakes

and offers a kind of airbrushed reality.

It might not be in every area of our life, but somewhere.

Somehow we need to make something however small.

We need to put pen to paper, pin pieces of wood together,

chop tomatoes and toss them in olive oil

and eat what we've made.

We need to make things because if we don't, we are nothing

but batteries for a corporate machine

that only needs us for what we buy.

And God intended us for more than that, maybe we can begin

to resist by simply choosing one thing to create today

in this writing, he reminds us that making

and learning reshape who we are.

Today's scripture reading says this even more directly

through Paul and his letter to the Romans.

Do not conform to the pattern of this world,

but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.

Resist the urge to conform, bowing to pressure

or following expectations.

Make choices that align with your values

and your spirit with your commitments and your energy.

The scripture says, do not think

of yourself more highly than you want,

but think of yourself with sober judgment in accordance

with the faith God has distributed.

We have different gifts according

to the grace given to each of us.

We all have different gifts, different talents,

different interests.

Challenge yourself.

Explore the undiscovered gifts given to you by grace

and learn something new.

Whether a clumsy, neophyte, or a graceful expert.

Do whatever makes your heart sing

and let joy fill your soul.

Religion, hobbies, crafts, rest, prayer.

All of these can be ways to resist conformity

and open ourselves to authentic, healthy transformation.

And yet this is not just about personal joy.

Part of the reason I wanted to talk about this is

because this is about resilience In a world

that is deeply troubled during stressful

and divisive time, having hobbies

that create a physical object is very satisfying.

I can't control the world.

I can't fix inequality, erase, prejudice, I can't cure,

can't or solve world hunger.

But I can create something with my own two hands.

I can set my mind to a goal,

try something new and see the results.

This is one small object that I can control.

I can choose what to do.

I can resist the heartache

and the hopelessness of the world through simple acts

of agency and creation.

Paul's call to resist conformity

and live with renewed minds may sound ancient,

but it speaks powerfully to our lives.

Today historian Timothy Snyder reflecting on modern



threats to democracy in his book on tyranny echoes  
that same call drawing on his deep  
knowledge of Europe's history.

Under fascism, communism, Nazism,  
and other totalitarian regimes,  
Snyder offers 20 practical guidelines each grounded in a  
historical example.

They they become these 20 short, short, short chapters  
and his very first guideline Do not obey in advance  
a call that echoes Paul's timeless invitation to think, act  
and live with intention.

Rather than simply follow the pressures of the world.  
Do not follow blindly.

Do not bow to social pressure or expectations.

Do not surrender to despair or helplessness.

In Paul's words, do not conform to the pattern  
of this world, but be transformed  
by the renewing of your mind.

The subsequent chapters in on tyranny offer various lessons  
drawn from the past century of authoritarianism.

It provides guidance and encouragement  
as we face the very real challenges to democracy  
and the founding principles of our nation.

Those guidelines urge us to take responsibility for symbols  
and visual experience of the world to stand out,  
to practice corporeal physical, tangible politics  
guidelines that resonate  
with our own commitments here at church.

At their heart, these suggestions aren't just political,  
they are profoundly spiritual.

Chapter four is called Take Responsibility  
for the face of the World.

It exhorts us to be aware of symbols, imagery,  
and visual representations of a loyalty  
and submission to tyrannical power.

He suggests us that we pay attention to those signs  
and symbols to ensure they're inclusive  
of our fellow citizens, not exclusionary in our own way.

Our church lawn signs are one small way we resist conformity  
with quiet persistence, speaking truth to power,  
welcoming the stranger, helping those in need, preaching  
above all the gospel of love.

And often that resistance means standing out  
when looking back on history.

The people we describe as heroes  
and righteous patriots were at the time  
frequently considered unusual, like centric  
and even misunderstood.

Which come to think of it sounds a lot like Jesus.

In looking through the 20 guidelines from Snyder's chapters,  
I would say that basically each one could be applied  
to Jesus' life and teaching.

So this is a whole sermon series that we're lucky.

I didn't try to write in one go.

If he didn't preach the messages himself directly, he lived

by them or would have something very  
specific to say about them.

His life was entirely shaped by an oppressive occupation,  
and his ministry was shaped by his resistance  
to tyranny and violence.

Schneider suggests that we make eye contact and small talk.

This is not just polite, he says it's part  
of being a citizen and a responsible member of society.

It's also a way to stay in touch with your surroundings  
and break down social barriers.

Once social barriers are more permeable, we're encouraged  
to practice corporeal politics.

You must be engaged in person among the people  
to protect the principles of democracy.

There are two boundaries he says that must be crossed.

First ideas about change must be engage people  
of various backgrounds who don't,  
do not agree about everything,  
something this church really respects and enjoys.

And second, people must find themselves in places, places  
that are not their homes, among groups  
who are not previously their friends.

Our regional culture inherited from New England, Puritans  
and hyper intellectuals.

Thank you. Harvard resists corporeal politics,  
corporeal religion, corporeal liberation.

I sometimes say that the farthest distance I need  
to travel is from my head to my heart.

But truth and intellect alone cannot nourish our souls.

Connect us to God or resist tyranny.

To renew our minds, we must be prepare, prepared to  
transform, not conform.

When Snyder tells us to stand out, to pay attention  
to symbols, to make eye contact  
and practice this corporeal nature.

I see, I see Jesus, I see him sitting with lepers  
and Samaritans, eating with outcasts  
and prostitutes, healing bodies as well as souls.

What Snyder frames as lessons  
for resisting tyranny were the daily practices  
of Jesus's ministry.

That ministry was as physical, vulnerable,  
and embodied as it was spiritual.

And this really brings us back to where we started.

When I asked at the beginning, who has it all figured out?

No one blessedly raised a hand.

And we thank God for that  
because if we knew everything, we'd miss the joy,  
the joy of discovery and exploration  
and learning something new.

The life of faith isn't about certainty, it's about  
practice, about trying, making, failing, creating,  
and letting God transform us Along the way,  
beloved friends, vgu again, he said, to practice any art,  
no matter how well

or badly, is a way to make your soul grow.

So do it. This week I invite you,

pick one small thing to create.

Make something. Try a new recipe.

Doodle in the margins, plant a seed, reach out

to a stranger, make something imperfect

and let it remind you that God is still making

and remaking each of us.

And that is how transformation begins.

So may we leave this place willing to stumble

and learn, willing to resist conformity, willing

to create something new.

May we be willing to live as Jesus did with courage,

creativity, and faith.

Amen. And may it be so.