

## Connect-ing

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Athelstone Uniting Church #117

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**Text:** Romans 12:1-21

*Note: Each person was given 3 x 30cm lengths of wool in different colours*



This year, we have taken on the Uniting Church SA's theme of Making Connections. Connect-ing is the focus for today.

We live in such a connected world. Through TV and radio we hear news from around the world. Those of us with smartphones can choose to be connected to whatever we need to know and whoever we wish to connect with. Through the internet billions of devices and people are connected across the globe.

Each one of us is part of an interconnected web of relationships – with God, with each other, with our families and friends and work colleagues and students and teachers and team mates, with the wider community and with creation. Each of these connections provide a way to faithfully join in God's mission for our world.

At Athelstone, we have a heart for connection: with God, our community, our world and each other.

Paul wrote in the letter to the Colossians:

*"I want them to be encouraged and knit together by strong ties of love."*

*I want them to have complete confidence that they understand God's mysterious plan, which is Christ himself. In him lie hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.*

*And now, just as you accepted Christ Jesus as your Lord, you must continue to follow him. 7 Let your roots grow down into him, and let your lives be built on him. Then your faith will grow strong in the truth you were taught, and you will overflow with thankfulness.*

Colossians 2:2-3, 6-7 (New Living Translation)

And then in his letter to the Ephesians

*Always be humble and gentle. Be patient with each other, making allowance for each other's faults because of your love. Make every effort to keep yourselves united in the Spirit, binding yourselves together with peace. For there is one body and one Spirit, just as you have been called to one glorious hope for the future.*

*He makes the whole body fit together perfectly. As each part does its own special work, it helps the other parts grow, so that the whole body is healthy and growing and full of love.*

Eph 4:2-4, 16 (New Living Translation)

These 2 readings fit beautifully with Romans 12, our reading for today.

We are a community of God's people, with our lives built on Jesus, united in the Spirit, knit together by strong ties of love.

Connected.. Connect-ing

Today I want to emphasise the "ing"! a bit like Unit-ing, it is important that we see ourselves as connect-ing – we are a work in progress... Jesus calls us to grow more and more like him, our relationships with one another are likewise a work in progress, our connections with others, with the community, with the world, are an ongoing work in progress. We are not static, where there is life, there is growth..

I want to share with you an image .. actually an artwork.. that picks up on this theme of connect-ing..

This artwork was the subject of an assignment I did as part of my study early last year, 2019. I needed to create something that represented pastoral care.

I had only just taken up knitting after a hiatus of more than 20 years. It was around the time that we began our new group, Threads, which had been started as a way to help us connect with the community. As you would know, Threads meets twice a month in the Indigo Espresso café across the road – we are intentional about being a visible presence in our community. We knit, crochet, stitch and spin. We enjoy each other's company over a cuppa, often with lots of laughter, while working on our individual projects. The projects are either for personal use or to donate to charity. We often have people pop in to ask what we are working on and have invited many to join us, and a small number have! We are growing...

Some Threads folk are highly skilled with yarn, so I decided to consult with the group for ideas about my artwork. An idea began to emerge: to knit a woollen blanket out of knitted squares. Patterns and wool were provided and I was encouraged to knit my first square



Not long after this, I was with a ministry colleague, Rev Anne Hewitt, at a women's retreat. Aware that she is very creative and does a lot of knitting, I asked if I could run my ideas past her. She 'got' what it was I was trying to achieve and brainstormed lots of ideas for how to create the pattern, for the type of wool, and the spiritual themes that could emerge.

I was thinking of making a big blanket – I do tend to set myself big challenges! - She suggested that I reduce the size of the project from a blanket to a wrap and use it later to wrap around people as a symbolic hug.

During a break at that retreat, while many of us spent reflecting on the themes of the retreat, Anne Hewitt snuck off and bought me a pair of beautiful quality wooden knitting needles. She gave them to me saying that for a project like this I will need the right equipment and that these needles are easier and more comfortable to work with than the traditional metal needles. She also encouraged me to work with natural Australian fibres and recommended Bendigo Woollen Mills as the place to order wool from.

I came up with my design for what I started calling my Hug Rug and then chose colours based on the wool available from Bendigo Woollen Mills.

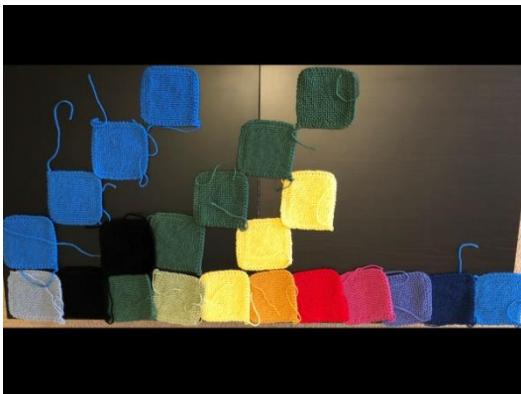
I tried to select bold vibrant contrasting colours, rather than soft pastels, so that the end result would also be bold and vibrant

It was so exciting when the wool arrived and I could begin!



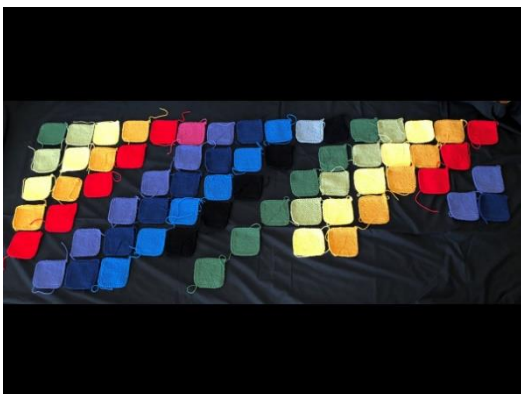
Over the semester I checked in with both the Threads group and Anne to let them know how I was going, to ask for advice when I was experiencing challenges and to adjust my ideas

it is important to do things in community as part of the body of Christ. As I learn from others, new ideas emerge as to how work through situations



To create this artwork I needed be willing to learn from others. They used their gifts to help and encourage me.

This artwork was born in community.



Knitting these squares became a spiritual discipline for me during this season. I knitted as an act of prayer. As I knitted, I became calmer and more focussed. Sometimes it helped me to listen, Sometimes it helped me to pray for a person or situation. At other times it simply helped me to slow down before bed when my brain was buzzing with the thoughts and memories of the day.

Spiritual disciplines are an essential way of helping us stay connected – with God and ourselves. they are a form of self care, helping us stay spiritually healthy. What spiritual disciplines have you incorporated into your life to help you with this?

It helps when we integrate our spiritual disciplines with the things we love doing.. so for me, it is with knitting.

Perhaps for you, it is when you are out walking in nature

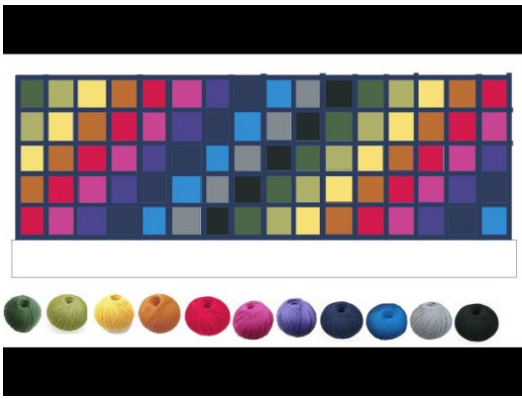
Or being creative with your hands Or reading Or sitting in silence

Or making music Or serving others..

The inspiration for the pattern came from photos I found on the internet of patchwork quilts. The ones that caught my attention had been stitched into a pattern that looks like a rainbow with a pixelated effect.

The rainbow is seen as a sign of God's promise of peace to humankind. (Gen 9:13)

There is great hope to be found in the assurance that God keeps his promises.



In the field of digital photography, an image magnified will reveal that the image is like a mosaic made of small squares. These squares of the picture are called pixels. Each knitted square in my artwork is like a pixel – the basic elements that make up the whole picture

Each square carried meaning as I knitted it

The overall picture needs all the individual pixels to be whole.

The body of Christ needs all of its members to be whole. (1 Cor 12:12-14)



Colours can convey many moods and meanings. Here are some of the meanings I reflected on as I knitted for various people and situations.

Green: Renewal, growth, hope, new life

Yellow: light, hope, joy, glory

Orange: Warmth

Red: energy, Spirit, sacrifice

Pink: Joy, happiness, liveliness

Purple : leadership, my own role as Minister

Blue: Sadness, mourning

Grey: Depression, illness

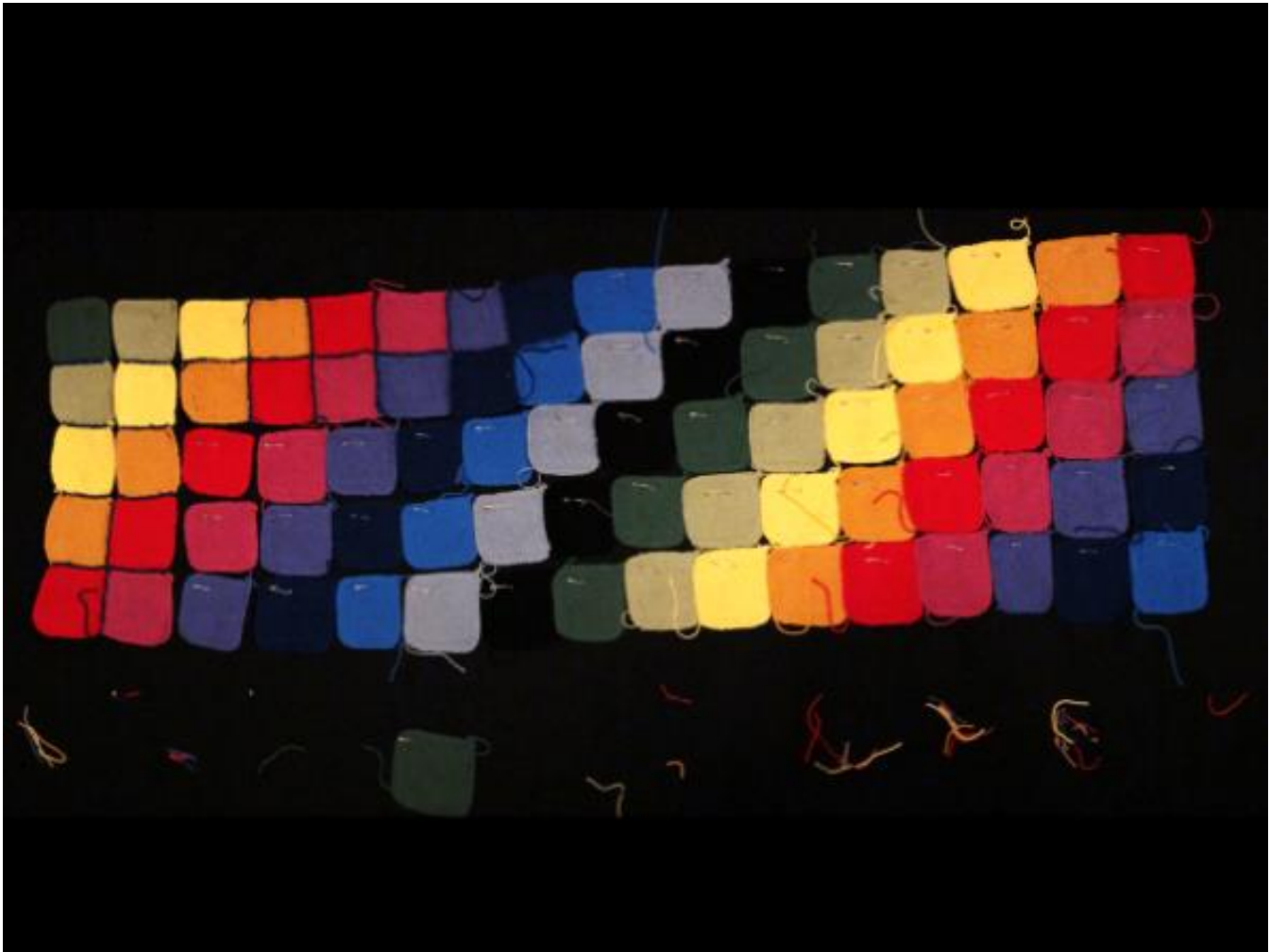
Black: Death, mourning, endings

The artwork carried stories, prayers, hurt, pain, joy of those I connected with during the first 6 months of last year.





I presented the artwork for assessment as an incomplete project. This was intentional. It demonstrated a work in progress.



I had made some attempts to stitch some of the squares together. While others were pinned in place on a black sheet. .

The squares that were stitched together represented those who are connected to Christ and to our community – whole and well – healthy parts of the body of Christ

The squares that were placed together and pinned in place represent those who are part of the body – works in progress – on their way to healing and wholeness.

The extra square – the green one at the bottom - represents those who feel like they're on the outside (whether they are or not), who feel lost and alone and that there's no space for them in the body. It is Green because there is always hope for new life.

Then there are all those loose ends that I kept. It felt important to show all my work – even the pieces that had been cut off...

Pick up your pieces of wool now..

At different times in our journey we can find ourselves associating with different ones of these elements.

Connected Works in progress Separated Apart

I wonder where you might find yourself in this image?

Perhaps you can tie or untie your wool in such a way that represents where you see yourself, or where you would like to see yourself...

Let's take a moment to do so now..

My hope for all of you is that wherever you find yourself, you will be able to find your way to healing and wholeness – transformed through the warm 'hug' of life in the Spirit as part of the Body of Christ.

Paul gives us some concrete steps to take to live a life transformed

These steps are often played out in our everyday moment by moment decisions

In how we treat our neighbour. In acts of kindness. As we show mercy to others.

It's not simply about praying to God, it's also about being the answer to our prayers for someone else

In the Message paraphrase, Peterson puts it like this:

"..we are like the various parts of a human body. Each part gets its meaning from the body as a whole, not the other way around. The body we're talking about is Christ's body of chosen people. Each of us finds our meaning and function as a part of his body. But as a chopped-off finger or cut-off toe we wouldn't amount to much, would we? So since we find ourselves fashioned into all these excellently formed and marvelously functioning parts in Christ's body, let's just go ahead and be what we were made to be, without enviously or pridefully comparing ourselves with each other, or trying to be something we aren't.

Then he provides that list of behaviours that help us build and maintain our connections.

Doing all these things is not easy. they require us to think about other people and their wants and needs rather than just our own wants and needs.

That doesn't always come naturally!

.. it is when we pay attention to others that we are being like Jesus.

We are a community of God's people, called to care for each other with compassion.

After assessment, my artwork was rolled up and put away. Waiting for the right moment for me to do further work on it.

After many months, and, with this being our year of connecting, I felt it was time to get it out again..

Now I needed to work out how to connect all the squares properly. I went back to Threads and asked for more help.



To join the squares I was told, it would be effective if I was to crochet a border on each square then crochet all the squares together.

I decided to use dark blue as the colour to connect all the squares. To me, it represents the vastness of the night sky – the eternal love of our Creator God.

So I began to pull apart that artwork, to crochet borders on the squares and then to attach them

Along the way I discovered the mistakes and unevenness in my knitting from the year before.

Rather than correct them, I decided to keep them in. So, the lumps and bumps and loose ends were incorporated into the whole – an honest and true representation that we are not perfect – we are all works in progress – connected in the bonds of love



So, would you like to see the Hug Rug?

*Unveil the rug...*

I wondered if it was ok to finish this work, which originally was submitted as a work in progress, and then I realised.. this is an aspirational image – an image of hope for the future – that we will all one day be reconciled and connected in Christ. All drawn in to the warm embrace of the God who loves us

*and* I have started a second layer... incorporating a few pockets...

because there is always room for more..

Amen

It is time now for me to let go of this Hug Rug and give it to you.. the community for which it was made.

My hope is that it can take on the role of a warm spiritual hug for those who need that reminder of the warm embrace of God.

