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Perfectly Strange

By Kendra Arsenault

MANY OF US ARE FAMILIAR WITH THE CHILDHOOD ALLEGORY, "THE UGLY DUCKLING." It is an all too familiar story about what it means to feel like an outsider. It captures that unsettling quandary about the insecurity we feel when we observe how different we are from the people around us. At the same time, it is a story about having the patience to allow time to vindicate our differences and the qualities that make us special, not defective. It captures the complexity of "becoming."

What I would give to listen to the exchange between a caterpillar and a worm as she tries to describe her unspoken knowledge that this is not where her transformation ends. I am sure many women in ministry can relate to this journey of self-discovery. Somewhere between encountering our differences and fully entering into flight, we have to learn to boldly stand in the knowledge of who we are without apology. Despite what our society, our communities, or even our church believes we should be, we must be what we cannot otherwise be: ourselves. And while our feathers are still jagged and molting, we desire the grace to look like the very strange creature we are for the time.

Sometimes there are no words to help us define just how we know the creature God has called us to be. We just know. Other times, we simply gain the courage to call ourselves by our own name. For me, it is taken me until this moment in time to validate the creative gifts with which God has endowed me. I have often wished

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that God would have mercy and send marching orders from heaven detailing exactly how I should live my life and what precisely to do to bring Him the most glory. I am disappointed to report, no such note has ever dropped from heaven for me. I do take comfort in the fact, however, that even Jesus did not receive the full knowledge of who He was until a short period before His crucifixion. This year, my thirty-third year, I have finally begun to see myself form into who God purposed me to be: a writer, a poet, a storyteller, a thinker.

Despite this comfort, however, there are still many reasons why I continue to feel a little strange. Maybe like many of you, I harbor big dreams, dreams that sometimes seem so far away they appear unobtainable. Yet it is the impossibility of my great hope that causes me to cling to God's promises a little tighter, Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and it will be opened unto you (Matthew 7:7). So, to all my odd ducklings who find themselves strange in the company they keep, this is my prayer for us: "God, give us the patience to not give up in the middle of our transformation. Give us faith to know that You are not

only the Author of our big unobtainable dreams but the Finisher of our faith, the Completer of these grand impossible hopes. Amen." ■

Kendra Arsenault is the host and director of Program Operations for Advent Next, a theological podcast curated for curious faith discussions. She is a graduate student at Andrews University pursuing her Masters in Divinity where she hopes to incorporate her two passions of theology and communication through visual arts.

Kendra received a \$100 scholarship for this article. If you're a youth or young adult interested in submitting an article for consideration, please contact: herald@lakeunion.org