

Written for University of Richmond's Baccalaureate

Spring 2021

Shared at *Wandering Together: Reflections on the Journey*



*My name is Casey Murano, and as a recent graduate, I'm grateful for this opportunity to share some reflections and art on my spiritual journey as I explore the intersection of faith, art, and service.*

It was a cloudy April morning, and I was walking from Moore Hall to dhall when something stopped me in my tracks: low and behold the ducklings were nestled in a snuggly huddle on the soggy grass right by the sidewalk! Immediately I pulled out a pen, plopped on the ground, and began sketching--because that's what I do as an artist! A few moments later, I noticed my friend coming down the path. I waved, beckoning her to share in witnessing this joyful community. But her response was oddly quizzical. Following her gaze behind me, I realized why. The communications team had set up with all their equipment.

Yes, the camera managed to capture a glimpse of my spiritual life that morning, the joy I find from engaging with the sacred in all things, whether that be through the ducklings, the act of drawing, or eating breakfast with friends. While these past four years have shown me faith can't be neatly packaged in a single frame, this moment I had with the newly hatched ducklings does point to a framework I recently encountered from Richard Rohr, a fellow Catholic and founder of the Center for Action and Contemplation. It's a

framework I'd like to bring with me after graduation, and it's called the cosmic egg. We each have *my story*, which is the yolk, contextualized by the white of *our story*, the community and all its historical context and the outer layer shell of *the story*, which is the divine, that transcends space and time. College has been a journey of learning to hold these three concentric narratives in conversation with one another, three art making experiences (often involving ducks) speak to the different layers of the cosmic egg journey.



*My story* was when I started making art through the practice of pilgrimage, which I broadly defined as a physical journey that prompts spiritual growth and intentional engagement with daily life. I made maps of campus, the Camino de Santiago, and Perugia, Italy where I studied abroad. These projects were teaching me how I walk in the world. One theme of my story is to be a ministry of presence: listening, and observing (always equipped with a sketchbook) like I did so happily with the ducklings that morning during my first year.



But especially with the pandemic when the world is displaced upside down, I realized pilgrimage wasn't just about documenting my journeys to exciting spiritual places. Now the world is on pilgrimage, and we are all

experiencing feelings of displacement, though in many different ways, as determined by each person's cosmic egg yolk. But the collective experience of radical transformation: This is *our story*. The work I have been creating for my senior thesis reflects this mindset. For example, the ducks at the James River prompt me to ask who doesn't have access to their calming presence at the river? Our story beckons us to listen to neighbors who have been directly affected by a history of injustices as we work to create a compassionate community.



Of course, engaging with the heavy reality of our story is hard, demanding, life-long work. *The story*, then, is where we find the hope to persevere and humility to recognize that we may need some divine intervention. I especially felt connected to the story when creating this one piece, a painting as a journey, was the concept. I experimented with many drawing techniques along the way, not quite sure where it was going but trusting the process. When I went to hang up this long ten foot piece of paper, it fell into a crumpled, fragile, cocoon-like heap that felt conceptually right. I called it "Feeling Through the Dark as Footsteps Soften" which comes from John Phillip Newell's book *Praying with the Earth* that I've been using for the past year. The poetic images of rivers, and interfaith approach provide a glimpse into the transcendence, the sacred.

I know from the long days I've spent in the studio, at the river and with the Office of the Chaplaincy in everything from Catholic life to Kairos to Multifaith dinners, the many pilgrimages I've engaged with this past year, and conversations with members of the University of Richmond community and beyond, that glimmers of God's presence already exist here on earth. Sometimes we don't notice holy encounters on our own; we need companions on the journey to point them out. The ducklings remind me of the unfolding cosmic egg that is my

art project of continuously seeking to engage with my story, our story, and the story in each and every moment in the interwoven pilgrimage of life.