

Gratitude for the poppies

**We cannot always create something out of nothing. Rather, we change what already exists, and these tiny alterations give us meaning and purpose in our lives.**

By [Carol Howard Merritt](#)

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It happens sometimes. I am sitting in the crowd of a conference. The speaker begins his presentation. It sounds familiar. Very familiar. Like, I could have written the lecture myself. While my irritation grows, the person next to me leans over and whispers, “Hey, I think they’re ripping off [insert something I wrote].” Then my neighbor looks at me intently until the end of the presentation when she says, “That

was bad form. The speaker didn't even give you credit. And he knew you were at the conference!"

It's really easy to get frustrated at these moments. The feeling is akin to a woman saying something in a committee meeting, everyone ignores it, then the guy across the says *the exact same thing*, and people applaud.

Yet, as the years wear on, I try not to get too annoyed. I mean, it could be that the person completely stole my ideas, but most likely, these thoughts made it into the world, and no one really knows who introduced them. Eventually, certain ways of thinking make so much sense that they become a part of our collective logic and they began to spring up everywhere. Elizabeth Gilbert talks about this in [Big Magic](#). She thinks of creativity as ideas that are searching for a body and compares the phenomenon to poppies in a field that all appear at the same time. In our art, when our ideas grow up like poppies, it's better to treat it as a moment of celebration, rather than resentment.

As artists (I include preachers in this category, for you must create on a relentless schedule), if we think that our ideas are original, then we will fall into the trap of thinking that they *must* be original, and that's just not possible. I am finishing a proposal for my next book, and I have to fight off the fear that I am writing something that has been written before began. The anxiety begins to choke me as I worry that I must say something completely different and unique, and new. *What's the point of writing, if it's already been written?*

Then, I begin to breath and remember that I can employ footnotes. I can give everyone credit when it is due. It's utter hubris to imagine that I can have a truly original thought. Plus, there are plenty of times when we work for years on a ground-breaking project, and someone gets to the finish line before we do. We look like we have taken an idea, and we just have to let it go.

I appreciate what [Paul Tillich](#) says on the matter:

In order to be spiritually creative...one must be able to participate meaningfully in their original creations. Such a participation is creative insofar as it changes that in which one participates, even if in very small ways.

We cannot always create something out of nothing. Rather, we change what already exists, and these tiny alterations give us meaning and purpose in our lives. So, we must celebrate the poppies, for although they look the same, they are each slightly different and they each have their unique place in this world.