



## ¿Dónde está el arroz con leche?

Transfiguration of Our Lord  
11 February 2024

Ascension Lutheran Church  
Pastor Chris

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus, the Christ. Amen.

A couple of weeks ago, CRASH held their annual chili/soup cook-off. Except for the interruption of covid, the cook-off has been an annual tradition since my arrival in 2010. As part of that experience there is often a dessert auction. The generosity of many of you assisted the students in moving closer to their fundraising goals towards the 2024 ELCA Youth Gathering in New Orleans this summer. While we were here setting up, I happened to be in the kitchen doing some prep work and found not one, but three desserts waiting in the refrigerator to debut at the dessert auction. Pastor Tony had made two chocolate silk pies. An apple bar dessert from Arlene Davis was waiting to be eaten and on the bottom shelf of the refrigerator was a round, silver container. Intrigued, I pulled out the container and peeled back the silver foil to reveal a full plate of “arroz con leche” or rice pudding. I was ecstatic. My mom made my rice pudding regularly. After her death, it is the one dessert I have not mastered. So, I could barely contain myself when I saw an entire plate of rice pudding. Now I was really excited for the dessert auction. No amount of money would keep me from the glorious deliciousness of rice pudding. The chili/soup cook-off took off. People sampled chilis and soups and the dessert magically appeared on the dessert table so that would-be bidders could preview the options. But wait! What is missing from the dessert review? The rice pudding. I looked at Klelin who was tending the dessert table and I said, “¿Dónde está el arroz con leche?” Where is the rice pudding? To which Klelin said, “There is no rice pudding.” “Of course there is rice pudding,” I said. “¿Dónde está el arroz con leche?” And again, Kelin said, “Pastor Chris, there is no rice pudding!” And then to prove the point, Pastor Edwin, who was standing behind Klelin says, “There is no rice pudding.” “But I saw it,” I said. And I ran to the kitchen, opened the refrigerator and looked at the bottom shelf. But the rice pudding was gone! Well, I think I saw it. I was sure it was there before the cook-off began. ¿Dónde está el arroz con leche? I was crushed.

Peter, James, and John have no idea what to expect from the invitation of Jesus to join him on the climb up the mountain. Scripture does not tell us that they brought anything with them – no walking stick, no food, no water – just themselves. Of course, we know better. The disciples were carrying many things up the mountain – some of those things weighed more than any backpack they might have shouldered. They were carrying expectations – their own and others. The disciples were carrying accusations, parables, miracles, arguments with pharisees, and one might assume, their own family members. They were also carrying their grief, their fear, and a prediction that Jesus makes about his death. Peter carries his public confession of Jesus as the Messiah. Peter, James, and John carry all of this up the mountain and it weighs them down as their shoulders hunch and their lungs hunger for oxygen. The disciples struggle over every pebble of loose gravel and do their best to follow Jesus but along with their expectations and their hope for who Jesus might be – they also carry their doubts. ¿Dónde está el arroz con leche? ¿Dónde está el mesías? Where is the Messiah? Is this the Messiah? Is this the one we have waited for, hoped for, prayed for? And, at the mountaintop, as if God can read the list of doubts the disciples have carried with them, Mark tells us, “Jesus was transfigured before them, and his clothes became dazzling bright, such as no one on earth could brighten them. And there appeared to them Elijah with Moses, who were talking with Jesus.”

Author Jan Richardson describes this mountaintop moment with Jesus like this: “Believe me...that when the glory comes, we will open our eyes to see it. That when glory shows up, we will let ourselves be overcome not by fear but by the love it bears. That when glory shines, we will bring it back within us all the way, all the way, all the way down.” It is wonderful idea – but this is not what happens when the glory of God visits this mountaintop. Instead, the disciples cover their eyes, faces to the ground. And yes, the disciples are overcome, not by love, but by fear. So much so – that Peter offers to build some transitional housing for Jesus, Elijah, and Moses. Because, he has no idea what else he might say. It is as if Peter said the first thing that came into his mind, when his mind could not make sense of what was happening. Have you been there? “Everything happens for a reason. God needed another angel. Or a plumber.” Say what now? Because what is happening to us is too



## ¿Dónde está el arroz con leche?

Transfiguration of Our Lord  
11 February 2024

Ascension Lutheran Church  
Pastor Chris

much for us to comprehend, it is as if we lose sight of our senses for just a moment and say the thing, we think we need to say instead of tending the moment with a sense of awe and support and presence and letting that be enough. Why? Because you and me, we carry our expectations, accusations, stories, healings, miracles, arguments, grief and fear with us wherever we go – to both the mountaintops of glory that overwhelm us and the valleys where the shadows of death can also overwhelm us. And so, I say again, “dónde está el arroz con leche?” In my confusion – I simply wanted to know what happened to the rice pudding I thought I saw. On the mountain top – Peter, James, and John simply want to make sense of the glory all around them. And of course, for each of us, and all that we carry with us – we want the assurance that someday we will be free – given permission to lay it all down and stretch our backs and lift our heads and stare into the light of the glory of God not in confusion or despair but in the joy of complete surrender and acceptance of the promise God makes to us - to never leave us – to call us beloved – forever. But how hard this is for us – to trust what we cannot see, except with the eyes of faith.

“Believe me,” writes Richardson, “I know how tempting it is to remain inside this blessing, to linger where everything is dazzling and clear. We could build walls around this blessing, put a roof over it. We could bring in a table, chairs, and have the most amazing meals. We could make a home. We could stay. But this blessing is built for leaving. This blessing is made for coming down the mountain. This blessing wants to be in motion, to travel with you as you return to level ground. It will seem strange how quiet this blessing becomes when it returns to earth. It is not shy. It is not afraid. It simply knows how to bide its time, to watch and wait, to discern and pray until the moment comes when it will reveal everything it knows, when it will shine forth with all it has seen, when it will dazzle with the unforgettable light you have carried all this way.” Dear friends, this light is already within you – though it is true we let this light be overshadowed by the burdens we carry with us. So much so, there are days when we scarcely believe the light is within us at all. But God does not let us forget.

¿Dónde está el arroz con leche? I went home the night of the cook-off, substituting my coffee cake and apple pie bars for the non-existent rice pudding. At church the next day, I told the story to my father and Marge Schroeder in-between services. Explaining that I thought I saw rice pudding, but there was no rice pudding to be found. Only to find out that there was indeed rice pudding! Made by Marge Schroeder! Gifted to my father! Placed in his truck between the set-up for the cook-off and the start of the dessert auction. I was not wrong. There was rice pudding. Hallelujah! I am not losing my mind. Perhaps I would not taste the sweetness of the arroz con leche but it did exist. Thanks be to God! Imagine my surprise upon returning home after the second service that Sunday, to open the refrigerator for lunch only to find the container with the silver foil top now residing in my refrigerator. All my doubts, my accusations of theft, my grief, the arguments with Klelin, Pastor Edwin, and in my own head. All of it laid down and let go because there in front of me was the prize I hoped for but could not find. Even when all hope had been lost, there in front of me was the prize I doubted would ever be.

My friends, the good news this day – is that the very light of God shining all around us on mountaintop when we are blinded and in valley when the light is so deeply hidden within us is still there today. It is always there. In your doctor appointment, in your grief, in your worry, in your anger, in your uncertainty, in your guilt, in your hunger, in your weakness, in your predictions about the future, in your doubts you carried in with you today – God is with you. God calls you beloved. It is time, my friends, to let down the burdens you carry, stretch your aching back, and lift your head. Jesus waits for you there, whether on mountaintop or in the valley low, Jesus, waits for you there. Lay it down people.

Jesus will pick it up. Because that is what we do for those we love – we carry what we can for as long as we can. All along forgetting, that the one who calls us beloved, carries us and the ones we love always – in the valley, on the mountaintop, all the way to the gates of heaven. Thanks be to God! Amen.