

Pastor Tony:

Christ is Risen! Alleluia!

Jesús ha Resucitado! Alleluia!

Dear friends, what an amazing gift we have today as we celebrate the 75th Anniversary of Ascension! Let me begin by taking a moment to recognize some very special guests joining us today. The Bishop of the Greater Milwaukee Synod, Bishop Paul Erickson. Pastor Frank Janzow and Deaconess Jan Janzow. Paula Bickell – and she's flying solo today because Pastor Jim had a prior commitment and couldn't join us this morning. And finally, Pastor Elisabeth Pynn Himmelman along with her husband Jacob and their son Jenz.

Together, with these distinguished guests, you and I join a much greater cloud of witnesses. We stand alongside that first group of faithful believers who gathered in 1949 to begin Ascension along with all those who have gone before us and join us now in celebrating 75 years of life and ministry – 75 years of transformation and renewal. We give thanks that God has brought us from those humble beginnings to be the church that we are today and are still yet becoming.

In today's brief but powerful gospel reading we hear Jesus teaching the parable of the prodigal, and in doing so Jesus offers a glimpse into the very foundations of our faith. This place and this community, you and I, all of us, we are grounded in the very gospel that gathers us. We are reminded that it is by God's magnificent grace and out of overwhelming love that we celebrate that God is in the business of renewal and restoration, shining light in the darkness, bringing forth life from death – that God is about transformation and making all things new.

I don't know that those first founders could've ever imagined that this is what Ascension would look like 75 years later. Thankfully, God's imagination is far more expansive. And this morning I would like to share two particular moments in the life of this incredible place that hold deep significance for Ascension and for me.

Who of those first gathered could've imagined that 75 years later, one of their pastors would be a person of color who would rise up from their very own pews. But in 2016 I answered God's call to begin the journey through seminary to become a pastor. And throughout the next four years, you, the people of Ascension generously supported and encouraged me every step of the way. Then in 2020, during a global pandemic, the Holy Spirit moved through the hearts of Ascension's people once again but this time inviting you to call me to serve as one of your pastors. Just a few years later you would do this again and eventually call Pastor Edwin to also serve as one of your pastors.

In 2017 when Ascension experienced the unexpected and tragic death of one of our teenagers, God would again shine light in the darkness. Ryan was a high school student of mine when I served as Ascension's Youth Director, and after preaching Ryan's funeral I was so overcome with grief that I needed to step out because I just felt like I couldn't breathe. And as I walked out of the sanctuary and reached the lobby I began to fall because I no longer had the

strength to stand, but it was a group of teenagers from our youth group, friends of Ryan's, students of mine who would catch me and hold me up. One of them then said, *"you're always here for us, now let us be here for you."*

These are only 2 of the many beautiful moments in the 75 year journey of Ascension. Moments where God was at work in the hearts of the people of Ascension...renewing, reforming, transforming, bringing life out of the ashes, shining light in the darkness. Throughout the past 75 years, you and I, along with countless others have been part of God's redeeming work in this place and in the world and I am excited for what God will do in and through us over the next 75 years and beyond. Dear friends – Together We Rise. Juntos Nos Levantamos!

Pastor Edwin:

Grace and peace from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen. In 1949, 24 disciples guided by the Holy Spirit took a leap of faith and decided to begin a new church. Seventy-five years later, I spend most of my Sunday mornings at 8:30 worship with a couple hundred members. But then at 10:45, I move to the Spanish sanctuary which we are still in double digits for attendance. As we planned for today's event, I have been inspired by imagining those original 24 Ascension members meeting the Spanish-speaking members of our congregation. New Lutherans who were willing to take a risk by becoming part of a new church. History is repeating itself.

I wonder if among the dreams of those 24 disciples was that this church would cross borders in its journey of hearing the call of God through our companions in faith. I wonder if any of them imagined that 60 some years in the future, a member of Ascension would travel to El Salvador on a synod trip and two years later, that member and I would be married and I would be moving to Waukesha and joining Ascension, eventually becoming a pastor and leading Spanish language worship. I left behind everything, including my home church. But God found me and many of you and led us to this new home of Spanish worship. I wonder If they could imagine that by 2024, Ascension would have sent multiple delegations to El Salvador. Next Sunday, our most recent delegates will share stories from last month's trip, and we invite you to join us between services.

I wonder if any of them would have been able to imagine the technology that would allow a group of Ascension members to gather at church to have breakfast while praying together over a tv screen with our brothers and sisters from Tanzania. Time spent connecting with friends Ascension has built in Tanzania over the past nine years.

I wonder if they could imagine our high school crossing state lines to travel to other states for service trips and youth gatherings and that they would return to help lead worship and children's sermons.

I am completely sure that they never imagined that the place where they met to worship God in one language, is now a Holy place where the message of love, joy, peace and above all hope is proclaimed in two languages at the same time, in their own place and with their own traditions. Traditions that help us see our own faith in a new way: the celebration of Las Posadas in which we meet to remember the journey of the Holy Family, the making of the alfombras for Holy Week, remembering our loved ones on the Day of the Dead, celebrating the gift of the Jesus, the light of the world on Three Kings' Day. If they could imagine a Lutheran potluck where posole and jello molds sat side by side on the serving table.

Ascension's founding members had no idea about the future of the church they started, but God knew the fruits that this community of faith would have over the years. God knew that this community of faith over the years would become a multicultural community, where children, youth, and adults celebrate, learn, and walk in this ongoing journey of learning about God's calling, here at home and afar. Brothers and sisters, Jeremiah 29:11 says, For I know the plans I have for you declares the Lord, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future." Together we rise, Juntos nos levantamos!

Pastor Chris:

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

For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found! And they began to celebrate.

"You can always come home," sings Alan Jackson. Wherever life's road leads, you can get back to a love that's strong and free and never be alone. In your heart there's still a place no matter how right or wrong you've gone. You can always come home. (Siempre puedes volver a casa) Songs of home are deep in our bones. You know these songs by heart.

Home on the Range

O give me a home, where the buffalo roam, where the deer and antelope play, where seldom is heard a discouraging word, and the skies are not cloudy all day.

I'll be home for Christmas

I'll be home for Christmas, you can count on me, please have snow...WAIT. STOP! No one is ready for that just yet.

Take Me Home Country Roads

Almost Heaven, West Virginia, Blue Ridge Mountains, Shenandoah River, Life is old there, older than the trees, Younger than the mountains, growin' like a breeze. Country roads,

take me home, To the place I belong West Virginia, mountain mama, take me home, country roads.

Home is the place we remember deep in our hearts. Home is the place that calls us when we know we have wandered farther than we thought we ever would. For the prodigal son, home is the place where he remembers the smell of favorite meals cooking; the warmth of a soft, worn blanket; the embrace of someone who loved you for you before you wandered into the world – before you told yourself you were unworthy of such love. Home is the place, where God blesses you with peace, safety, contentment, sanctuary. This my friends, is home. To be gathered together in community – where there is always a place at the table for you, no matter how far you roam, no matter how long you are away. Here, in this place, you will always find a welcome. This is home. Because God waits for you – always watching the horizon – to run to welcome you. Ascension has always been a place of welcome, sometimes because of us, sometimes in spite of us, but always because God is the One who welcomes. (Dios es quien te invita a volver a casa.) God is the One who invites you to come home. That is God's promise in this life and in the life to come. By the death and resurrection of Jesus, God promises us eternal life. Jesus ha resucitado! Alleluia! Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia!

And because of all of us remember stories of home a little differently, we thought we might share a gathering of memories for these past 75 years. Take us home, Adam. (Video plays)

Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia!

Jesus ha resucitado! Alleluia!

Together we rise. Juntos nos levantamos! Thanks be to God. Amen.