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Blessed are
those who
mourn,
for they will
be comforted.

Matthew 5:4

Blessed Are Those Who Mourn For They Shall Be Comforted

I have read these words of Jesus more in the last two weeks than any other verse in the Bible. I know, some of you will say that Pastor Chris always tells us in sermons that he is preaching on his favorite Scripture, sometimes, speaking of his favorites week after week. But in these last days of June, since the 18th (when we gave my mother back to God) and really since the 12th (when I began to fear that the stroke that kept my mom from waking up from surgery would keep her from ever waking up), I have come to find comfort in this simple, ten-word promise of Jesus.

Author Vicki Harrison wrote these words, *“Grief is like the ocean. It comes in waves, ebbing and flowing. Sometimes the water is calm, and sometimes it is overwhelming. All we can do is learn to swim.”* Never in our imagination did we expect that my mom would not survive the triple bypass surgery scheduled for June 10th. The night before her surgery we gathered together at my parent’s home to pray and have communion together. There was laughter, a few tears, bread and wine, and a prayer for God’s tending and protection. And my youngest daughter – the one who honors her Norwegian roots better than the rest of us – the child who runs from hugs and slips out of handholds faster than we can hold on to her – took my mother’s hand in the middle of the prayer circle and held on tightly throughout the entire prayer. I did not know she had done this, but my mother was so caught by the out-of-character moment for our daughter that she shared the moment in a final conversation with my wife before we said our good-byes and gave our hugs and spoke words of love one last time. The moment of our goodbye at their house is imprinted on my memory with all the vivid colors of my mom’s sweater – a lingering smile on her face. And when surgery was complete, the surgeon shared words of hope and good news that all had gone exactly as expected. It would only be later in the evening, after they began the process of removing her sedation and beginning to remove the vent that we would find the first signs of a stroke. Over the next few days, the blood clot that caused her first stroke would split into three separate clots and cause a massive stroke. One my mother would not wake up from in the days ahead.

I share all this to give thanks to God for your care – even in our physical distance and separation. We are broken. Shattered for a loss we did not expect. In the days of waiting, before our worst fears were confirmed, I was afraid for the presence of the power of death I could not shake from my thoughts. I have felt the power of death. I have been close to this power that tears away life more times than I want to remember. And yet, in sharing the journey with my dad and my sister, I have never felt so powerless in the waiting. My dad and I were allowed in just briefly after her surgery – and when we entered her room – we held hands – told her we were there – prayed and told her we would see her the next morning. My dad kept vigil by my mother’s bedside. My sister and I were not allowed to go into the ICU. On the day we transitioned to palliative care – my sister and I walked with my father down a long hallway to tend this woman we had loved in this life. A woman who called us “sweetheart” and “honey.” A woman who used our full names when she was frustrated with us. A woman who always looked at my father with love – even when she was angry. We knew it would not last – her anger. Forgiveness came easy to this wife and mother. Now we begin the search for pictures to remind us of younger days. We laugh at our how much better I have aged. Lord I was chunky in earlier days! And my thinning hair before I began to shave my head. Yes, my friends there will be pictures when we celebrate her life. And celebrate her, we will. In whatever way this pandemic will allow – we will celebrate her and give thanks to God for her.

And in these moments of remembering her, I again find myself coming back to the words of our Savior:

“Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.”

To God be the glory. Thanks for sharing this journey of life and faith with your pastor, who in these long days does his best to honor the title of son to a father who is grieving and a mother who now stands in the presence of our God. Peace be with you.

Pastor Chris

Latino Ministry

Latinos in Wisconsin have been hit harder than many other demographic groups from the pandemic and resulting economic crisis. Latinos tend to work in jobs that are considered essential, preventing them from social distancing to the degree other groups have. Most of our Latino ministry members have at least one coworker that has tested positive. None of our members work in jobs that provide health insurance, adding to their anxiety about becoming ill. And while nearly all of our members continue to work, many of the families have had a significant reduction in hours. Due to complications of the immigration process, some of the families will not receive any stimulus money. As you can imagine, families that work in fast food do not have reserves of savings to rely on during difficult financial times.

Thanks to gifts from the Good Samaritan fund and a grant from Lutheran Disaster Relief, Ascension has been able to provide some financial relief during these difficult times. Some of the families have received assistance with rent payments. We also worked with a local farmer to purchase a pig. The meat from this purchase was shared with all of the families. This has been a huge blessing to families that have been eating lots of canned goods from the Food Pantry. In addition, we were able to provide business to a local farmer and keep the money here in the Waukesha area. Mary Lou Charpata has been an angel sending gift cards to families in difficult times.

Fortunately, as the economy opens, most of the members are returning to full time employment. One need that still persists is the struggle that newly-arrived Latinos have in being able to find affordable housing in Waukesha. Although many Spanish-speaking countries are in turmoil, there are no systems in place for them to be welcomed in most other countries as refugees. Instead their only legal route to live in safety is often to walk to the US and ask for political asylum. Receiving permission to apply for political asylum involves an extensive background check. Yet once a person is granted permission to live in the US, it is still several months of waiting before they receive permission to work and drive. There is no housing assistance as there is for people that come here as refugees. All of the Ascension families that have been in this situation have spent many of their first months in the US living with family members or teachers from Waukesha that were willing to help.

I have spent the past several months helping a young woman here from Venezuela that is in this situation. She was attending a Spanish-language evangelical church in Waukesha. As she continued to struggle, another member from her church told her to contact Ascension for help since we have a reputation for helping those in really difficult situations. She was renting a room in a situation that was becoming increasingly unhealthy. All she could afford for rent by herself was \$400. As she and I continued to struggle to find an apartment she could afford, she also asked her employer, Nissen Staffing, for help. Nissen wasn't sure what to do in that situation, so they contacted Jo Buth and Ascension for help. Although this young woman had hoped to become a member of Ascension when the pandemic was over, she finally gave up on Waukesha and moved to Texas where she had a greater support system to see if she was able to find a safe living condition.

Gracias to everyone that has supported our Latino families, whether now during the pandemic, or when they are newly arrived.

Edwin Aparicio
Spanish Language Minister



Delivering pork to families.

WORSHIP & GROW

Music Ministry

After over 160 years in ministry, Our Savior's Lutheran Church in Milwaukee has been in the process of closing down and selling their building.

Through the generosity of the congregation, Ascension was blessed with their baby grand piano (in East Hall for use in Spanish Language worship), a set of two timpani, and several other smaller percussion instruments. Our Savior's also offered selections from their extensive choral music library.



"New" baby grand and baptismal font in the Spanish sanctuary.

Our Savior's has had a rich musical tradition over many years. While this certainly has been a difficult task for the people of Our Savior's, we are deeply grateful for the opportunity they have afforded to continue the use of these beautiful instruments in worship.

In addition to the musical items, they also have gifted a pair of altar candelabras and their baptismal font for use in the Spanish sanctuary.

Vicki Taylor

Director of Music Ministries

BLAST

It is with great sadness that we grieve along with the Marien family and the rest of our Ascension community at the death of Pastor Chris' mother and one of our amazing BLAST superintendents, Vicki Marien. Vicki, alongside her ministry partner, Susan Williams, has been a bedrock of our BLAST Children's Ministry and she will be deeply missed. We give thanks to God for the gracious gift of Vicki and her strong commitment to providing the children and families of Ascension time and time again with wonderful opportunities to experience God's love.

JOLT & CRASH

As the church leadership continues to explore options to safely re-open the church for ministry activities, please continue to watch for announcements via email about the possibility for in-person youth activities this summer. We have missed you and the opportunity to gather for fun, service, and learning more deeply about God's love for the world. We look forward with hope to the time when we are able to gather together again soon. Enjoy the summer!

Tony Acompañado

Director of Faith Formation



Care Ministries

Our lives are more demanding these days as we are experiencing many safety challenges with Covid-19 still everywhere and anxiety due to the division of our races in our country with Racial Unrest. It is a stressful time for everyone. Stress is also on the rise due to isolation and control of growing concerns about family, money, health, and personal safety. While we can't completely avoid stress, we can take some sensible precautions so that life's challenges can be managed minimizing the negative effects of stress.

1. Find a refuge. Remove yourself from the stressful situation and find a quiet spot where you can be alone. Any private space will do.
2. Stop and breathe. Be seated, close your eyes, and take a few deep breaths to calm yourself and gain some distance from the stressful situation.
3. Take your physical and emotional pulse. Check your heartbeat and allow it to slow down. Release the tension in your body. Now check your emotional state and identify the dominant emotion you are feeling. Fear? Anger? Frustration? Grief?
4. Search for the source of the emotion. In any situation there are factors you can change, and factors beyond your control. Focus on what you can change.
5. Take good care of your self — body, mind, and spirit. Eating a balanced, nutritious diet will help fortify you against stress as well as rest and exercise.

A healthy spirituality is also a key to handling distress. Sharing faith with others brings bonds of friendship and support and puts you in touch with God's healing nurturance. If you feel spiritually empty, it may be a sign that stress is taking its toll on your soul. Try to find an appropriate way to express your spirituality in your daily life, through quiet time for reading and reflection or prayer.

Brenda Lytle, RN
Director of Care Ministries

Psalm 4

This psalm may be comforting when you need to calm anxiety. God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.

*Answer me when I call to you,
my righteous God.
Give me relief from my distress;
have mercy on me and hear my prayer.
How long will you people turn my glory into shame?
How long will you love delusions and seek false gods?
Know that the Lord has set apart his faithful servant for
himself; the Lord hears when I call to him.
Tremble and do not sin;
when you are on your beds,
search your hearts and be silent.
Offer the sacrifices of the righteous
and trust in the Lord.
Many, Lord, are asking, "Who will bring us prosperity?"
Let the light of your face shine on us.
Fill my heart with joy
when their grain and new wine abound.
In peace I will lie down and sleep,
for you alone, Lord,
make me dwell in safety.*



SERVE

COMMUNITY OUTREACH

We will not be holding our annual Block Party this year due to the virus. The Block Party has been our major event to introduce our neighborhood and community to Ascension. Our Community Outreach Committee met to discuss creative ways we can do outreach without a specific event and with an uncertain future. Our online church services have been a huge success. A great way to invite people to Ascension even in this uncertain time is to share the worship posts. The more people who share the services increases the possibility that people may join in on either the English or Spanish service. It is our task to share the Word whether it is in a live service or an online service. For many people, it is easier to try out a church via an online service before they actually walk in the door of a new church. Sharing posts also raises our presence in Google searches and will make Ascension more visible. We encourage you to also share posts from the Ascension Facebook page or the Ascension Mission Outreach Facebook page that may be of interest to the community.

Our Community Outreach Committee shared a blog at the meeting recognizing all the changes society is going through right now. That means how we do outreach will have to change also. The best thought from one of the blogs was this: “Right now, every church is a startup and if you see it that way, you can advance your mission. There are so many people to reach, and an entire next generation in need of the Gospel.” Invite your friends to services or events, speak positively about your faith and your church. That is planting the seed and the Holy Spirit will do the watering.

BLESSING BOX

We continue to supply the Blessing Box with food, cleaning products and personal care items. Our neighbors stop by on a regular basis to take some of the donations our congregation supplies. The Little Free Library is seeing heavier use also with so many people stuck at home. Please help us keep these two projects going by putting donations directly in the boxes until the church building is open again.

COMMUNITY PARTNERS

Ascension has made some diligent efforts in working closely with community agencies who work with those most in need. One of the biggest concerns for all of them is that their main source of special funding is from annual events. Because of the virus, events have been cancelled or rescheduled. This has had a great impact on their ability to continue to provide services. Please support them through a financial contribution or through participation in their events. We will post information on the Mission Outreach Facebook page and the weekly announcements. As their programs are able to go back to full service, we will also post volunteer opportunities.

Shirley Wehmeier

Mission Outreach Wing Leader

OUTREACH FOR HOPE

Hard to believe that only a few months ago, we were just starting to navigate the challenges of COVID-19. At that time, we planned to hold the 2020 Outreach for Hope Family Bike Ride on September 12 as planned. Today, we better understand how the virus spreads, and those who are most at risk. Out of respect for the safety of our valued participants, we have decided to cancel the in-person portion of the event. We are proud to announce that our 2020 Outreach for Hope Ride/Run/Walk is going virtual!

What does that mean, exactly? We are inviting bikers, runners and walkers to remotely participate in 25 fitness and fund-raising challenges in honor of Outreach for Hope’s 25th anniversary. You decide the time and place of each activity, as long as it’s between now and September 30th. Once you’ve registered online, we’ll mail your t-shirt(s). We’ve also created a blog with helpful resources, and a Facebook Group for participants to share their progress and photos— so that even though we’re physically distanced, we’re still connected as a community.

But some things haven’t changed. We’re still providing individuals, families, and congregations with opportunities to build community; to learn about the ministries your gifts will help support; and to work together to raise life-giving funds for those in need. With your help, we want to register a minimum of 625 participants, log 25,000 miles, and raise \$150,000! Your financial support is more important than ever before in our 25 year history.

Can we count on you to help us get there? Register now, and join our Facebook Group to receive important updates and connect with fellow riders, runners and walkers in the weeks to come!

In Christ,
The OFH Team

TANZANIA UPDATES

There continues to be lots of contradicting messages coming out of Tanzania about what is happening in regards to the corona virus. Their president has declared the country to be free from the virus and he has reopened the country. Our friends have not seen cases of the virus in Samaria. On the other hand, other leaders in the Meru Diocese and various missionaries that are partners with the ELCA have reports of the virus spreading and continued night time burials to hide the deaths. We continue to pray for the health of our brothers and sisters in Tanzania.

This is the time of the year when we normally have our appeal to raise the funds to provide 900+ students with a school lunch for 200 days. You can feed all 900 children at our sister parish schools for just \$30. Where else can you do so much good with such a small gift? In many cases, the lunch is the only consistent meal these students receive in their day. The teachers have noticed that the students' grades have improved. The students are no longer distracted by hunger pains and able to focus on their learning.

We have improved our administration of this program. We learned that when we send the money in July, the church leaders are able to purchase more food since this is the time of the year when food is most affordable. The food is purchased directly from local farmers, keeping all of the money in the Tanzanian economy.

If you haven't already made your contribution, you can sponsor a day or a week by visiting the online giving page of the church website and selecting 'Tanzania.'



Students at Samaria Primary School with food from 2019 lunch program.

EL SALVADOR UPDATES



El Salvador has been in the midst of a serious economic crisis as the country has been on a nearly complete and total lock-down to fight the pandemic. This lock-down was dramatically interrupted by tropical storms Amanda and Cristobal at the end of May and beginning of June.

The worst effects of the storm were in San Salvador where there was loss of life. It is estimated that there was over \$200 million in damage from Amanda alone. With so many people losing their homes, quarantine quickly ended as schools and churches were turned into emergency shelters.

In a report from Pastor Julio, there was substantial damage in our sister parish communities. Puerta Parada is a port town and experienced flooding. None of the members of that church lost their homes. San Jorge and Llano el Coyol are both located on the sides of the volcano and nearly all of the families in both congregations had all of their crops for the year completely washed away by the twin storms. We are still gathering information for the needs and next steps.

The country is slowly trying to put some aspects of the quarantine back, while gradually reopening businesses. The agroferreteria have been granted permission to re-open. They have been in a difficult situation because they have not been permitted to open, yet their landlord has been expecting their rent payments. We hope that now that they are open they will be able to begin to recover some of their significant financial losses.

ADMINISTRATION

Council News

The last few months have been busy for the church council – evaluating and planning for re-opening, beginning the process to prepare to interview for a new Director of Youth Ministries position (whether or not the congregation votes to call our current candidate, we will still need a new Director of Youth Ministries), facility work and scheduling the congregational meeting.



The church council is working on plans to re-open the facility for worship and some meetings in July, provided we can safely do so. We had planned to begin outdoor worship June 28th. However, we've delayed this to July 12 in respect for the Marien family to rest and have time to grieve, knowing the Ascension congregation is with their family.

The Council team will meet on July 9 and whenever necessary until Ascension is totally open to all.

Needed parking lot repairs will be starting in July. The lots might have some small closures so we will make sure you will be updated when or if that happens.

We plan to hold a congregational meeting in August. E-alert and service announcements will be sent to keep you updated. I am excited for this meeting. Two items are on the agenda for congregational approval.

- The sale of 1319 Dopp St.
- Calling a new associate pastor

Great things are happening at Ascension with the grace and love of God.

See you at church.

Karen Simington
Council President

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Ascension

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