



Gracias a Dios

Fifth Sunday after Pentecost  
16 July 2017

Ascension Lutheran Church  
Rev. Christian W. Marien

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

It has been a mountaintop of ministry kind of week. After worship last Sunday, our Director of Faith Formation, Tony, was hard at work with the last of the preparations for our high school mission next door week long event. And Monday morning high school students and adults jumped in with both feet – devotions, breakfast, and a full day of service to their church – with the pruning of plants out front and a full day's work in the memorial gardens – weeding, tending, and shaping the space all the way to the ash garden. An incredible day. Later in the week – the Waukesha food pantry would get a cleanup inside and a makeover outside complete with mulched flowerbeds. Thursday would take the students to one of our member homes for a healthy weeding of flowerbeds and the tending of the deep grief of one of our members through the transformation of their yard. It has been a good week.

But then add to the week – the arrival of our brothers and sisters from El Salvador. Bienvenidos! Thursday was full of feasting and canning and swimming at Ottawa Lake. Friday was full of tours of partner churches in Milwaukee with community gardens and captured rainwater projects. But my favorite part came Friday afternoon when we gathered to bowl at Bayshore. Where there are video screens and glowing neon lights. Explaining bowling in Spanish was fun to watch. Explaining in signs and gestures was even better. Watching the smiles unfold when just one pin fell down and the ball stayed out of the gutter. Now that was priceless.

13:3 And Jesus told them many things in parables, saying: "Listen! A sower went out to sow. 13:4 And as he sowed, some seeds fell on the path, and the birds came and ate them up. 13:5 Other seeds fell on rocky ground, where they did not have much soil, and they sprang up quickly, since they had no depth of soil. 13:6 But when the sun rose, they were scorched; and since they had no root, they withered away. 13:7 Other seeds fell



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among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked them. 13:8 Other seeds fell on good soil and brought forth grain, some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty. Jesus ends the story with the words, "Let anyone with ears listen!" Brothers and sisters listen!

Over the past days – God went out to sow. And as God sowed, seeds fell on good soil. And the seeds have produced a great harvest to the glory of God. I am grateful for this moment in the life of our church. To receive brothers and sisters from El Salvador is nothing short of a miracle. Here, in this moment, to provide hospitality – literally means to "love the stranger" except - Nina Mirna, Amilcar, Omar, and Claudia are no longer strangers in our midst. They are our hermanos y hermanas – our brothers and sisters and therefore...no longer strangers when they rest in our arms.

I was reminded that a seed is a rich symbol of the process of living and dying. It is no surprise that the seed is often used in faith traditions to illustrate the spiritual journey, and the moving from one season to another. In the Christian tradition, Jesus often used the imagery of agriculture, the language of the land. He spoke about crops and weeds, good and bad soil, sowing and harvesting. Jesus wisely rooted his teaching in the things people could understand, and he used the symbol of the seed to illustrate a profound message about what it means to be human, and to live a life of the Spirit. *"Very truly, I tell you, said Jesus, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit."*

This image reminds us of a truth written into the whole of creation: that life can only come by death. The grain of wheat is ineffective and unproductive as long as it is kept away from the soil. But when it is cast into the ground – into the cold tomb of the earth – then from within comes life. If the species of a plant is to continue, then its seed must change, must be transformed, must lose its identity, so that the new plant may grow. If the seed is kept in safety and security, it will not bring forth anything new. Ahhhh...now it makes sense...in order for our relationship to grow...in order for the Body of Christ to



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grow and change and find strength – new life – the seeds of our churches must leave the safety and security of our home churches and go into new places. Where we may learn the story of God’s love in other languages and through the faith and love of brothers and sisters we have yet to meet.

What can you learn from the stories of these days? So very much! Today we are reminded that God goes before us. Today we remember that we need to hear the story of God’s love as much as we tell the story of God’s love. Today, we remember that the great cloud of witnesses that surrounds our worship has grown once again – with the great and faithful saints of our brothers and sisters in San Jorge and Usulután.

I give thanks to God for our new friends – for Omar, Claudia, Amilcar, and Nina Mirna I give thanks to God for their courage, their love, their joy, and their faith in God and their faith in their brothers and sisters here at Ascension. Gracias a Dios. Thanks be to God. Amen.