

Jesus answered them,  
<sup>24</sup>Very truly, I tell you, 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.  
<sup>25</sup>Those who love their life lose it,  
and those who hate their life in this world  
will keep it for eternal life.  
~John 12: 24-25

Dear People of the Northern Great Lakes Synod,

As I write this, we are in the midst of spring in the U.P. I daresay that even spring in northern Wisconsin cannot compare as the residents at the southern edge of our Synod will welcome tulips and daffodils weeks, *weeks!* before their northern siblings.

Spring in the U.P. is characterized by heavy, wet, snow – frozen mud - dirty snowbanks – sap buckets hanging off of dead looking trees – and weather whiplash as temperatures vacillate between the arctic cold of January and the tease of sunshine warmth that has the power to thaw.

But just as Easter follows Good Friday, so also will spring eventually make a solid appearance (by summer 😊). The sleeping earth will awaken. And what had been dormant and quiet within the darkness of snow and frozen dirt will once again grow and be green in the longer light of summer days.

I do love it that the light lingers longer. But let us not forget the value and blessing of darkness. In darkness, there is rest. When we finally get to plant seeds in warm soil, there is anticipation and hope for new life. It is in darkness that a seed gathers what it takes to grow. It is in darkness that its energy coalesces in preparation for change. Plant a seed in rested, thawed, and warm dirt...add water and Ta Da! In due time, the seed sends forth a shoot which grows exponentially - to become a potato plant or a tomato bush or a watermelon vine – something incredibly larger than the seed itself. It is miraculous even as it is ordinary.

When we plant seeds in our gardens, we have an expected timetable. We generally know how long a seed will lie in dark earth before we can predict when we will see the first signs of growth. Knowing the length of time helps us be patient even as we are expectant.

However, the germination of seeds of faith or the expectant hope of when some effort of ministry will bear fruit is a complete unknown. There is no timetable to which we can refer to bolster our patience. We cannot predict the future. We cannot even know for certain whether the seeds that have been planted will grow. It may well be that given the uncertainty of these days – both in and out of the Church, that it feels like we are “in the dark”.

But again, let us not forget the value and blessing of darkness. What if the darkness, or this time of expectant hope, need not be a time of anxiety or fear but rather a time of coalescing our energy in preparation for future change? What if we are receiving now, when we cannot see the future, all that we need for the challenges ahead? The value of darkness can be in the waiting, in the hopefulness, in the preparation, in the being watered so that we have what we need for future growth. As we focus this year on “Apollos watered”, we think of what seeds of faith and ministry need in order for growth and new life to happen, not only for what we contribute to nurture seeds, but also in what we receive for new life to grow in and through us.

Jesus was planted in the darkness of a tomb for three days. While in that darkness, perhaps he rested, or perhaps God gave him what he needed to prepare him for transformation, or perhaps something coalesced in him so that he could burst forth from the tomb with light and life. Whatever his time in darkness looked like and felt like, it gives us hope that darkness and waiting, death and dormancy, are not the enemy.

In the pattern of the Christian life, we loose our grip on what we love: familiarity, certainty, what we think we need - and instead open our hand to

receive what is good from God – even if it is only, at least for now, the gathering energy in preparation for change, for transformation, for the new life that will come..unexpectedly.. from darkness.

Yours in Christ,

Bishop Katherine Finegan