

*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.*

~John 12: 24



Dear People of the Northern Great Lakes Synod,

The season of gardening is almost upon us. When I was a child, my mother would cajole, plead, and bribe me and my siblings to take a turn weeding in the garden. I always resisted, disliking not only the bending in the hot sun, but the time away from play, even as I had just complained that there was nothing to do.

After my family and I moved to Republic, my husband and I agreed to try gardening. As we planned and planted, I regretted not having paid more attention to all the wisdom that I know my mother had about gardening, but I was too reluctant a student.

It was a surprise to me then, as I weeded the garden, when I unintentionally uprooted a green bean seed that had already sprouted, and what surprised me was how the seed was literally disappearing into the sprout. As I held this disturbed sprout in my dirty hand, I could see that the seed had been split open by the urgent growth of this little tendril shoot that sprung from the mysterious depth of the center of this seed, no bigger than....well....a bean seed. The two halves of the seed that flanked the sprout were pushed to the sides, up and away, and they were getting smaller as the sprout gathered what remained of the seed into itself for upward growth.

I had never seen a seed sprout, not that I could remember, not that I had ever paid attention. And I was newly in awe of the miracle that God provides with seeds and

dark earth, water and sun. And then to think that this small sprout would, and indeed did, grow into a bush full of green beans, despite all the weeds that surrounded it. One small seed was transformed into a gallon freezer bag full of long and plump green beans, beans that graced our table at more than a few meals, where my children could count on me to say, just as my mother had, "These beans are from the garden."

God is in the business of new life and transformation, most particularly, transforming death into life. And we are both privileged and burdened to witness the current and ongoing transformation of the Church. Death is hard. We suffer it. We would rather not die. And yet, there is no Easter without Good Friday.

This Spring, in this Easter season of new life, the congregation of St. James in Marinette, WI will give new life to the Church as their church closes. Its end will also be a beginning as it loses itself in support of other ministries and participation in other communities of faith. And yet, St. James will never be lost. It will be

remembered and honored as any beloved whose life we celebrate. As in all things, it had a beginning and it will have an end, that God transforms into beginning again.

Just as Jesus the Christ was transformed. Through the open and empty tomb, we are given the clear message that death is not



the final word. The grain that was buried for three days is still bearing fruit – as the faithful gather, as they are equipped, as they are sent to plant seeds of faith – seeds that lose themselves in new growth and yield a harvest to a world hungry for the presence of God in Christ Jesus.

May God bless your seed sowing efforts, both in the dirt of your garden and in the world.

Yours in Christ,

Bishop Katherine Finegan