

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

Tomorrow begins "The Three Days" of Holy Week. On Maundy Thursday, we hear of Judas' betrayal and the disciples partaking in what we call "The Last Supper." How different it all seems this year. We are unable to worship together, to hear the words of scripture in the sanctuary of St. Paul's Lutheran Church, or to participate in Holy Communion. In this way, this is a time of fasting for all of us.

Yesterday, I read an article in the La Crosse Tribune about Victory Gardens. While these gardens were prominent especially during World War II, the article encouraged the planting of Victory Gardens now, to assist with food insecurity and to provide for the poor and vulnerable in our communities. But I would like to suggest that the idea of planting Victory Gardens brings even more than physical food to us at this difficult time. It can bring us spiritual food, as well.

During the next three days, we will be reading scripture passages that carry with them a great deal of sadness and darkness. We hear of Judas' betrayal, Peter's denial, Jesus' arrest, trial, and crucifixion; the loneliness of Golgotha, and the disciples scattering. But I would like us to consider our lives right now, like a Victory Garden. We are the seeds that have been planted in the earth. There is darkness all around us. If we focus on this darkness, we can feel isolated, like the seeds separated one from another. Yet, during this time, we need to remember that God is at work. We are planted in God's rich earth, and God is providing rain and sunshine and God's word to help us grow. Each day we are moving closer to the light; moving away from the darkness around us to life above the surface. Moving away from thoughts of sadness toward thoughts of life abundant. Yes, we are in a time of sadness and darkness, and the scripture readings of the next three days will add to this sadness. But even during this trying time, we are alive, being fed and watered by God's almighty hand, growing through God's grace toward a fresh start and a new beginning. If we place our trust in God, if we continue in God's word, we **will** see the light of God shining on us and in us, in new and fresh ways.

Let us think of this time of being away from Holy Communion, as a temporary time of fasting. We have been fasting during most of Lent, and will continue our communion fast into Easter and at least part of "The Time After Easter." While not being able to partake of the bread and wine at this time is difficult, we can think of this extended time of fasting as preparation for the celebration that is to come! We **will** celebrate together again, and when we do, we **will** celebrate with joy, thanksgiving, and the exuberant return to partaking in Holy Communion.

In addition to the bulletins for Maundy Thursday and Good Friday that you have received, we will send out the link for the Good Friday service on Friday morning and look beyond this event to the Easter Vigil. Let us join together on Friday, with other brothers and sisters in Christ, by watching the online service. Then, if you are able, please select a time to pray. The Easter Vigil will take place as in the past, except this year, we will pray in our homes, yards, or while walking in our neighborhoods.

Let us always remember that although we may be physically alone, we are never truly alone, for Christ is with us. And the glory of the Lord will be revealed to us, as we continue to grow and move closer and closer to the light of God in the days to come.

Blessings and peace,

Pastor Cathy