

March 18, 2018 – 5th Sunday in Lent
Pastor Erin Bouman, Irving Park Lutheran Church
John 12:21-33; Jeremiah 33:31-35

Unless It Falls

The sun on the bulletin cover looks a bit like the sun on the flag of Argentina, as our Sunday school children might say. This Lent in their lessons they've been coloring the flags of each country of focus. Argentina's flag has a sun in the middle.

We're seeing the sun, more. After Tuesday, the spring equinox, there'll more sun than dark, every day. And we're feeling warmth, more, and seeing buds, more, spring is coming. "The days are surely coming," as the prophet Jeremiah said. The days are surely coming, when the seed that falls to the ground will bloom, as Jesus said: "Unless it falls to the ground and dies, it remains a single grain. But if it dies, it bears much fruit."

It strikes me that as we've listened to our special speakers these past five weeks, we've heard about grains, falling, and bearing fruit. We've heard from our speakers about the falling away from what is familiar. We've heard about the singleness, even the loneliness, that can accompany living in a land that is not your own: Anna spoke about being unsure if she had a host family; Ole wondered, as a guest, how to address racism; Bruce reiterated the disorientation of living abroad; Emma saw the crushing toll of occupation. In all of these testimonies there is a sense of falling. There is a kind of dying that comes with living in a foreign country.

And there is a bearing of fruit. We heard, this, too, in the way the experience enriched them: how they saw things, who they are, new people they came to know and care for, and how they want to share all of this with others. When asked to speak about it in public, in church, they said "Yes!" It was that fruitful, for them.

In many ways the two speakers that we heard today are themselves fruit: they are fruit born of John and Sandra, who fell away to Argentina—and how fruitful that was for their offspring, Simeon and Abe, who themselves bore fruit, their children. How the whole Stumme clan, how all our Lenten speakers, have enriched this community. And others, too! There are numerous other people within this congregation whom we could have asked to share about their experiences abroad. But that would mean extending Lent.

Moving to a different country is one way to know falling, and bearing fruit. But there are any number of other ways that don't require a passport—which is good, because last Saturday my family and I went to the post office to renew a passport, and it is not a fun process. My husband, who spent several years in Ukraine, says he has seen Soviet lines that are more clearly marked and that have friendlier clerks behind the counter.

You don't need a passport to bear fruit. You only need to be willing to fall, and die. You only need to follow the one who says that is what you must do, a truth that is earthy and sure. You only need to follow the one who is truth, and life, and way.