

Dancing into Resurrection

Praise be to the God of our risen Lord Jesus Christ!
What death holds in its cold grip, God sets free!
What we consider doomed to decay, God reinvigorates!
What despair buries, God raises to new life!
Therefore our hearts are glad,
our tongues sing for joy
and we live in hope!

It may seem strange that I am returning to the Easter story today, but there is good reason. The lectionary gospel for this, the fifth Sunday of Easter, takes us back to Jesus farewell discourse, those last words before the whole trial and crucifixion story is set in motion. We are accustomed to counting the weeks of advent and the weeks of lent, but the weeks of Easter – I had not previously considered that we are again in a time of waiting; a time of wondering what is next in this story.

In these verses, Jesus makes another of his ‘I AM’ statements – I am the vine. Previously, we have heard him say that he is the bread of life, the light of the world, and the living water, among others. But this time, he concludes his metaphor with a “you are” statement – I AM the vine, YOU ARE the branches. A relationship is defined; one of mutual dependence, provision, and union. A relationship of promise and possibility. Now five weeks after Easter, we can come back to Jesus’ farewell discourse and consider what these words mean in light of his death and resurrection. The ministry of Jesus ends if the vine produces no branches; the disciples of that moment and of this moment, are in a relationship of mutual dependence, provision, and union. Reminding ourselves of the significance of this mutuality is why we repeat the story each year.

Today, I want to take you on a journey of remembrance, of reliving the Easter story and of ultimately dancing into resurrection.

As I explained in the children's time, the enactment of the Easter story is core to Guatemalan Christianity. What began as Catholic tradition, imported from Spain with the colonial invaders is now uniquely Guatemalan. Mayan colours and imagery are part of the alfombra created as acts of worship and sacrifice. Whether Catholic or Protestant, or perhaps no longer affiliated with a church, Guatemalans come together to relive the Easter story and tourists flock to see the pageantry. I have been profoundly moved by these experiences and today, I want to share this experience with you.

The Guatemalan visualization of I am the vine and you are the branches begins here at La Merced, a beautiful baroque church in Antigua. The Spaniards engaged Mayan craftsmen to decorate the church with images of grapes, a fruit foreign to Central America, so we notice the clusters of grapes looking more like images of corn, a fitting symbol the people of the corn. I will move the images without commentary. Look for the beautiful alfombra in various stages of construction, the changing colours as the story progresses – purple until the crucifixion, black until resurrection.

Our second lectionary text reminds us to love one another, because love is from God, and God is love. God sent his son so we might know this love. This knowledge is cause for joy; Jesus dances out of the tomb, people dance and sing in the streets. We are reminded that the story lives in us – we are the branches.