

PASTOR'S ARTICLE



Dear Redeemer and friends,

October brings with it beautiful fall weather. It's really my favourite season. The leaves change into spectacular hues of yellow, orange, and red, the cooler temperatures bring relief from the heat of the summer, and rituals of thanksgiving remind us to honour the goodness of God - for land and farmer, harvest and food, family and friends.

Honestly, though, this year feels quite different from last year at this time. Under the new reality of this pandemic, we know that as cooler temperatures come our way, some of that isolation we experienced at the beginning back in March overshadows our fall festivities. The summertime and entering into Phase 3 enabled us to move outside for walks and other outdoor activities, for gardening, eating out, and socially distant visits with our family members and with our expanded social bubbles. Typically, as Canadians we hunker down for the winter months anyway, but now we have moved into what the government is saying is the second wave of the virus. It feels like Thanksgiving this year is tinged with a mixture of sadness.

Received in my inbox last week was a letter from Martin Luther University College. The letter informed our Synod that The Auxiliary will be no more. The Auxiliary was established in 1913 by Ida Stahlschmidt of Preston with four other women and it grew from there. Ida and the others thought that a women's group "could be a good support to the newly established seminary. For over 106 years, the Auxiliary has been supporting students studying at the seminary for the Lutheran ministry..."¹

I received the news with sadness and with gratitude. I am so thankful for the faithful support of the women of the Auxiliary in my own training as a pastor. The Auxiliary provided the funds for Clinical Pastoral Education (CPE) - a requirement for M.Div students. The CPE unit helped give students the confidence and necessary skills for pastoral care in a clinical setting, like in a hospital or a prison. It was truly invaluable. The Auxiliary made sure each seminarian received a quilt lovingly made and given as a gift of support from congregations all over the Synod. Each year, at their annual meeting, new M.Div students were asked to speak about their journey into rostered ministry. In what I am sure was an agonizing decision, the board of the Auxiliary decided to disband the organization. You can read the reasons for that decision in their letter that is included right behind these pages in Crosswords.

Sadness mixed with gratitude. I think, for me, the letter from the Auxiliary brought these feelings to the fore. And perhaps I am not the only one who feels this way as we make our way to Thanksgiving.

As I write to you memories resurface of my pilgrimage with Pastor David. At about this time, David and I were close to arriving at the end of our pilgrimage in Santiago de Compostela for Canadian Thanksgiving. When we got to the end of that almost 800 km trek, right there in the plaza in front of the cathedral, there was sadness mixed with gratitude. Sadness that our journey had come to an end and grateful that we had made it all that way. We could actually see those emotions on our own faces as well as on other pilgrims' faces that day. The two emotions are not mutually exclusive to any of us.

In accepting the feelings that came as I walked my pilgrimage, three words typified my learning: struggle, joy, and gratitude. Struggle is simply a part of human life, there is no avoiding it. We all know and have experienced hardships that come to us without our asking. It seems 2020 has brought a plethora of them.

I learned that joy comes in small moments. The smell of wild fennel in the morning brought back memories of my mother. The company of a butterfly as we walked reminded me of the beauty and the fragility of nature. A friend to walk with in silence, in prayer, in stories shared, in mutual support, reminded me of the necessity of human community and human solidarity.

The biggest learning for me was gratitude. Gratitude for my body and its capabilities. Gratitude for time. Gratitude for those who had been before and walked the same path. In the walking, I was grateful for my life. For my faith. And still, in front of that cathedral, as we stood at the end of our journey, there was a sadness even as we knew there would be new beginnings. We picked Thanksgiving as our arrival date for a purpose.

Sadness mixed with gratitude. As human beings, we can hold both of those together. Through faith, we keep putting one foot in front of the other. The journey will take us through struggles, to be sure. Yet even in the midst of those struggles, we can still recognize and feel joy. And we can most certainly be grateful. Grateful for the faithful witness of women and men who have gone before us. Grateful for what was. Grateful for today, for this life, and for what will be. And, most especially, grateful to God, who in Jesus, walks this bumpy but beautiful road with us.

May you have a blessed Thanksgiving.

Pastor Katherine