

JUNE

“Walking in the Garden” by Deaconess Kat Peters

Hymn Suggestion

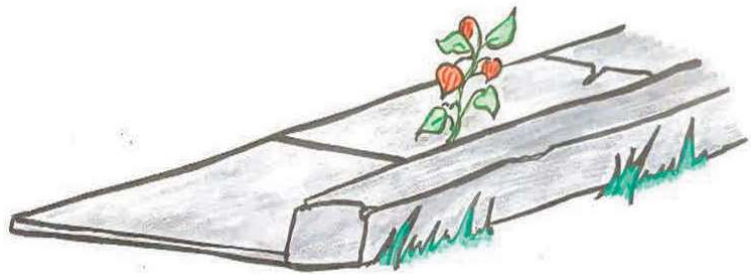
“Built on the Rock” (ELW #652, LSB #645)

Scripture

“As he came out of the temple, one of his disciples said to him, ‘Look, Teacher, what large stones and what large buildings!’ Then Jesus asked him, ‘Do you see these great buildings? Not one stone will be left here upon another; all will be thrown down.’ When he was sitting on the Mount of Olives opposite the temple, Peter, James, John, and Andrew asked him privately, ‘Tell us, when will this be, and what will be the sign that all these things are about to be accomplished?’ Then Jesus began to say to them, ‘Beware that no one leads you astray. Many will come in my name and say, “I am he!” and they will lead many astray. When you hear of wars and rumors of wars, do not be alarmed; this must take place, but the end is still to come. For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom; there will be earthquakes in various places; there will be famines. This is but the beginning of the birth pangs.” Mark 13:1-8

Devotion

In September 2021, I had the great privilege of taking a walking tour to learn about history and resilience in Gary, Indiana, in a part of the city called Midtown. This is where VJ Records was located, where the Gary music scene was nurtured and led to some of the most famous and important recording artists of all time. This is where mayor Richard Hatcher was elected the first African American mayor in the history of the United States and where architect William Wilson Cook built some of the most iconic buildings of his time.



On that day, our footsteps traversed cracked sidewalks, overgrown empty lots where these iconic buildings used to stand but whose stones have since been cast down. And we visited four community gardens on our two-hour walking tour, where we walked humbly through squash patches, tomato vines, sunflower forests, fruit and nut tree groves. Walking among beds of herbs and collards and chiles, we heard stories such as the that of the founder of the Episcopal church garden. She related how, when she saw she had \$2.10 left to her name,

she heard God tell her to go buy seeds. And how the children at her church now have a "seed ministry," where they save seeds so that others can also start gardens.

Midtown Gary, despite being the epicenter of the industrial age, is now a food desert. Many of its residents suffer from diet-related illnesses such as diabetes. Driving down Broadway in Midtown, the boarded-up buildings are interspersed with empty lots, not a supermarket in sight. But when you look closer, you also see food growing through the cracks, through the gravel. After visiting one of the gardens, where I got to sample heirloom tomatoes that tasted like candy, I looked down and saw ground cherries growing out the cracks in the curb next to the road. I learned to eat these in Costa Rica, where I lived for nine years, and where the small fruits are called uchucas --- little orange cherries wrapped in their own individual "leaf papers," like a tomatillo.

The neighborhood around the garden is home to multi-generational black families, but also to burned-out houses, boarded up and used now for drug sales. In an economy where simple small homes in a white community are valued at \$300,000, homes in this Gary neighborhood are valued at around \$43,000. The social divisions and lack of food that Jesus talks about in Mark are painfully evident here.

As we look around, walking humbly, listening, we see stones cast down from great buildings. Leaders come to lead us astray, people turning on other people. It is a stressful and uncertain time, and we can imagine how the disciples might have felt listening to Jesus talk about social upheaval. In the text, we can see that Jesus does not tell them that the world is ending, but rather that something new is being born.

As Christians, we know that God, in Jesus, is making all things new. We get to participate in this transformation. We pay attention for the inbreaking of God's reign of justice, abundance, and peace for all. We yearn for green gardens in food deserts while witnessing fruits growing up through the sidewalk cracks. We may be frightened when we see beloved landmarks removed or our own privileges curtailed. Yet, Jesus reminds us not to be alarmed. We can pay attention for signs of new birth, and we can participate by planting seeds and watching them grow into food and into well-being, especially for the most vulnerable among us.

Questions for Reflection & Discussion

- How can your family or congregation choose transformation over despair in a tumultuous time?
- What does the call to act justly, love mercy, and walk humbly look like today in your community?

- What does the image of a community garden mean to you in light of the text from Mark?

Prayer

Lord, help us to see the world as you see it -- beyond the stone buildings that exist, to your reign. Let us not be distracted by those who would lead us astray, away from your vision of justice, mercy, and humility. When stones fall, or weeds grow, or things break, give us the courage to know that you are making all things new. Give us strength to be part of the transformation. Help us to see your blessings in the cracks in the sidewalk, and let those blessings be a gift to us and to all, especially to the oppressed or marginalized. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.

About the Author

Deaconess Kat Peters has her Master's in Education and Master's in Rural Development from San José, Costa Rica, where she lived for nine years working in study-abroad, and as a Deaconess in the Central American Lutheran Church. She now teaches Spanish at Indiana University Northwest and does various community and intercultural projects as part of her New Backwater website and blog project (www.newbackwater.com). She lives in Valparaiso, Indiana, with her husband, their two sons and their cat.