MARCH 2025 VOLUME NUMBER 04

CULTING GO





Sermon Series

By Pastor Joanna Mitchell

My parents had a tremendous garden in my childhood home. My dad did the pruning, and my mother did the gardening. It was a perfect combination. Every spring or fall, whenever the season was right, my dad would take the shears and clippers and go tend to the yard. I don't know if my mom could watch. At times, Mom's lilac bushes would decrease dramatically in size, and I would hear Mom lamenting about how Dad pruned back too far. This lament would last until the next growing season because Dad was usually right. You had to clip back the branches and my mom's garden thrived because of all the work my dad did in cutting things back to make room.





This is our invitation this Lent to cut back to make room for God to grow in us.



Luke 4:1-13

Our invitation this Lent is to cut back to make room for God to grow in us. My days are busy. My desk is cluttered. My time at home is often filled. Now, I will confess that a good portion of the mess on my desk could be thrown away. Frankly, it's old work, old news and it isn't serving me anymore. And even my time at home is sometimes filled with bad habits, too much time scrolling on my phone or watching tv. And so, what if for these 40 days of Lent, we find a way to make space: to let go of the unnecessary things in our lives that have overcrowded our heads, our hearts, our homes and allowed for our faith to grow.

Lent is a season that invites us to engage more deeply in our spiritual life. It is a time to wander in the wilderness, a time to go deep and be reflective. I am usually good at doing something for a month at a time. I can try a new practice or commit myself to a change in behavior for at least this short period of time. So, I hope you will join us and commit yourself to being a part of our Lenten Series and practices of "Cultivating and Letting go."





What does this look like? You are invited to join us on Wednesdays during Lent at either 1pm or 7pm for worship. During this time, we will explore this theme. Some weeks we will focus on what are we holding on too tightly to and how might our lives and our spirits change if we let go, other weeks we will be tilling the soil and inviting God to grow in us.





But even if you can't join us for Wednesdays in Lent you can still participate in this spiritual exercise. We will have prayer journals for you to use through the season. We will send invitations in Grace at a Glance and prayers for you to use in your devotional life. Our prayer is that as we clear away whatever is filling our lives and ourselves, we might discover something beautiful underneath that has been waiting to grow, God's Spirit of love, and peace that whispers our name in love and reminds us of who we are: God's beloved and that God is here to help us grow closer to God and closer to God's creation.



WAYN WANT WNG

Faith Across the World, it Brings Me so Much JOY!!!

On the last day in Belize, we were invited to reflect, "Why do you think God brought you on this mission trip?" After reflecting on this question and offering a different answer first, eventually I responded with my deepest truth, "because it brings me so much joy!" I love meeting new people in new places. I love fostering relationships throughout the week that the day-to-day busy-ness of home life and ministry simply cannot afford. I love trying new foods and learning from different cultures, gaining new perspectives that allow me to realign my priorities and live differently. I love living my faith in action and wrestling and growing in my faith too. And I love sharing all of this with people, especially those who have never had the opportunity before. The last three years we have brought people to Belize who listed an international mission trip on their bucket list and together we made it happen. Together we were newbies and seasoned veterans. We were individuals and families. We were young and old. We were of faith and lapsed faith. We were construction able and not. We were all along for the ride and transformed through this experience. And that brings me JOY!



We were all along for the ride and transformed through this experience.

I have been on at least 10 mission trips in my life - trips as close as my hometown, and as far as Belize, trips to Canada, Mexico, even Green Bay, WI. Through these experiences I have learned it doesn't matter where you are, God calls us to serve our neighbors. We can serve when we ask God to open our eyes to see what is ours to do. What gifts do I have? How can I serve?





This was my first time going back to the same place. It gave me great joy to enter the school yard in Maya Mopan and be greeted by children asking, "are you, Maria Mountain?" "Yes!" They remembered me and the silly name I had given to help them remember my name "Maria Mountain, because I am tall." It was equally humbling when the pastor invited me to his home, shocked I was back and had brought my dad. I brought my mom too, I told him. And his eyes shone with tears of gratitude. This congregation from Minnesota cared enough to come back and care in his community. These moments of connection weren't just with me, but with others who had returned. Because we had been here before, because the trust was built between our communities. we were able to start where we left off. We were able to focus on people and not projects. We were able to see ongoing transformations in the community. ³ Transformation only God can do.

On Grace's first trip to Belize, the team met a man who was steeped in addiction, his life and relationships were messy. He didn't like us around. The next year, he came around again and connected deeply with members of our team. This year, he had restored relationships with his family and had just gotten a new job but better than that he led our team in building a new preschool playground, something he had been asked by his community to lead. A sign of the trust he had restored with his community. I was excited to see this change and to get to work alongside him in this project, I don't often get to use power tools! And it was in the midst of our work together that he began to ask some deeply theological auestions. Questions about sin and separation from God, questions he admitted he had been wrestling. Because of our ongoing partnership with Belize, I know we will be able to discuss when we see each other again.

I reflected on this experience and only God can get credit for this transformation but the ongoing partnership and relationship with this community in Belize allowed us to see God's transformation at work. This is just one of the countless stories we could share!







On one occasion an expert in the law stood up to test Jesus. "Teacher," he asked, "what must I do to inherit eternal life?"

"What is written in the Law?" Jesus replied. "How do you read it?"
He answered, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind; and, Love your neighbor as yourself."

"You have answered correctly," Jesus replied. "Do this and you will live."
But he wanted to justify himself, so he asked Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?"

- Luke 10: 25-29

I find it interesting, the ease with which I can look at my neighbor and expect to see God looking back when I am away on a mission trip. This is one of the main reasons I think mission trips are important in cultivating faith. So, we can train our eyes and hearts to view with compassion and care. It's practice! If you want to practice with us, maybe join us on next year's mission trip in February 2026. For more information email me

mariam@graceandover.org or Nancy Jenkins dnjenkins@comcast.net or Mike Schaaf mcccc06@msn.com. Maybe we find ways to serve closer to home in our faith community or in our community or with our ministry partners. And I know Will is looking for adult chaperones and youth participants for the youth mission trip to Chicago this summer too.

Luke 10 continues with Jesus telling about the generous and compassionate outsider from Samaria who cared for a man beaten on the road who had been passed by other more obvious helpers. Jesus ends this Good Samaritan story with a call to action, "Go and do likewise."

"Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God's grace in its various forms." - 1 Peter 4:10

The Seeds of Faith

By Aaron & Melanie Weixel

We were recently asked to share about raising our kids with faith in relation to our experiences at both Grace and Seeds of Grace. For anyone who has not met us we are the Weixels, Aaron, Melanie, Lily (5) and Jackson (2). We are relatively new members to Grace; we joined during the trying times of 2020. Growing up in Lutheran Churches we both knew with the start of our own family we would want to find a new home to worship. We visited many local churches, and while all of them were welcoming, we knew immediately where we wanted to worship ongoing. The feel of the church, the positive messages presented, the congregation, and the strong youth programs were all important deciding factors that were shown right away with Grace. Those things we were looking for in a community have continued to be consistent and we feel that as a family we are able to grow with the church in our faith. This has also been confirmed by our extended family who love to join remotely from out of state for Sunday morning worship and will let us know if they did or did not see our kids for the children's message. Having both of our children enrolled in Seeds of Grace has been amazing and allows us to grow in our faith together as a family. It may be cliché, but you never realize how important a little someone can be until you have one in your life. We can honestly say that we have never had a concern about the care or education that our children have received while at Seeds of Grace. We have seen the safety of our children prioritized by the actions of Grace with recent renovations, which we are grateful for. The staff treated us like family and everyone we interacted with has been wonderful.





We believe it is important for our children to get the message of the bible and God's love vs. only the standard education that you may get at another childcare facility. The messages that are taught weekly in the daycare program align with what is presented in service on Sunday or in Sunday School. This allows for multiple exposures to the stories and messages being told. Our children have brought up some big questions and we feel have developed a greater understanding of some of life's big situations due to being a part of Grace and the daycare program. Lily has asked numerous times at home to pray at mealtime, say prayers at night or to talk to God about what she is thankful for which we can contribute to the routine that she has developed while attending Seeds of Grace, Jackson has a hearing deficit and Seeds of Grace has been accommodating to his needs, working with outside support staff and us, as parents, to ensure his learning needs are met. He has excelled and is keeping up with standard, age appropriate, expectations. We had also been through a difficult period with some toddler behaviors which were less than ideal and Seeds of Grace staff were compassionate, flexible, showed great care and understanding of child development to work through that period of time. We felt supported and hopeful for that phase to resolve, where at a different daycare facility, we could have been afraid of having to find new care which would have been devastating. He often doesn't want to go to nursery on Sundays due to that being his classroom five days a week, but he is working on learning patience while sitting with us during services. The bags that are put together and books have been helpful to keep him busy. Our children ask attend church on Sundays, comfortable attending extra youth events when they are able, and if you see them running around looking like they own the place or bugging staff, we wish we could apologize, but it means the world to us that they feel at home within the walls of Grace.

CHILDREN & YOUTH

By Will Weikle

Community is the soil in which the seeds of faith are planted. As the Children, Youth and Family director, I have the honor and privilege of tending to that soil among our youngest members here at Grace.

I adore the way that our regular programming that happens through the school year provides a consistent space for this community, but there is just a different kind of community building that happens on a summer trip. I'd love to share a few short stories that highlight seeds of faith planted during our summer programming.

At VBS last summer, my role was leading the "science time." I used to be a teacher. and science has always been my favorite subject, so this opportunity was an absolute joy. One of the science challenges was trying to purify dirty water with a variety of provided materials. I recall one group wanted to work together to repeat the experiment over and over. The community building from that shared experience of learning. and making the connection that science is a gift from God was a beautiful moment that I hope will continue to blossom as they continue to learn more about their faith and about the world around them.





One day at Summer Stretch last year, we cleaned up a park in the Mississippi watershed area. An impromptu "who can fill up their garbage bag the fullest" competition began. This opportunity planted a seed that serving others and cleaning up our community is a powerful way to connect with God.

I have so many more stories, from Summer Festival Camp to our big high school trip (mission trip to Chicago this year!), but I am already almost over my word count. So come and talk to me to hear more stories just like these ones!

These summer ministries are vital to creating space where the seeds of faith can be planted in the lives of our young people. Not only that, but this space is also where seeds of faith can be planted in your life as well! By supporting these ministries with your time, talent and resources, you will have a unique opportunity to live out and learn about your faith in a different way. I hope you'll consider joining me this summer. And if you have a child or youth in your life, be sure to register them for summer events 2025!

CUNITIVATIVG SEEDLINGS

By Nissa Rieck

As with any gardener, the arrival of seed catalogs, increasing daylight hours, and occasionally unseasonably warm days, provoke daydreaming, and planning. Anyone who knows me would not be surprised to learn this includes color-coded spreadsheets with seedling pots and plant markers to match. So much planning.

This Lenten season's theme of "Cultivating and Letting Go" reminds me of the 2024 gardening season, when the results of all that planning didn't quite match the daydream.

After methodically starting 80+ tomato seed varieties, hardening them off, and transplanting, I began tending the plants intensely. Every day, buckets of side shoots and wayward branches were ruthlessly culled from the garden. Various organic treatments were lovingly applied to the foliage. The plants were picture perfect until...

In July, I accompanied Grace high schoolers to Christikon. During my 10-day absence, Andover experienced multiple days of high nineties temperatures and daily heavy rainstorms. Upon return, my heart sank to see the garden had become an over-grown jungle.

Feeling defeated, I attempted to get the jungle back into control. But it was too far gone. It looked monstrous. I was considering ripping out the whole garden from embarrassment.

But then, something pulled me back. What if there was value in a garden jungle after all? I ignored my embarrassment and invited all my neighbors over to pick as many tomatoes and squash as they wanted. They gave me strange looks when I told them, "No, really-take as many as you can pick," but finally came and picked bushels of vegetables from my over-exuberant plants.

The daydream of perfection gave way to the reality of a sense of community and sharing. That reality was far more meaningful than the daydream.

While they were picking, we chatted about gardens, our families, their hobbies, and just got to know each other better. They even brought my family fresh eggs from their chickens in trade for the tomatoes.

The daydream of perfection gave way to the reality of a sense of community and sharing. That reality was far more meaningful than the daydream. (And not once did they comment on the less-than-perfect appearance of the plants.)

So, who knows what will come up from the seeds that we sow? Whether your plants are organized or have a plan of their own, I hope each of you find hope and delight in the process of digging in the dirt, cultivating the plants and letting go of plans and allowing God to work through whatever fruits may grow.

Reminder, please join us for the second annual Gardens of Grace Plant Exchange and Free-Will Donation sale sometime in May. Look for information and announcements in early April.



For the Hungry By Kate Morphew

What does Grace Food Shelf do? Our food shelf is named "'Til All Are Fed Food Shelf" and it is an emergency food shelf to help those in an urgent need of food. The food shelf accepts requested food items that are unexpired, unopened, and non-perishable, along with monetary donations to restock the shelves.

dedicated group of volunteers unpack donations pack food bags and people requesting food. We operate from a specific set of food items based on a list created with the help of professionals. The food shelf operates best when only the requested items are donated.

Items that are supplied to those in need:

Cream Soups	Peanut butter	Canned Meat
Soups	Macaroni & Cheese	Snack Crackers
Pancake Mixes	Syrup	Pasta
Beans	Canned Vegetables	Spaghetti Sauce
Baked Beans	Canned Fruit	Tomato
Spaghetti O's	Rice	products
Beef Stew	Boxed Potatoes	Boxed Desserts
Canned	Hamburger Helper	Cereal
Jelly		

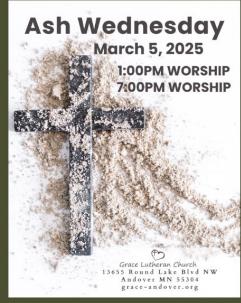
This month we will be having a food drive to request specific items from the congregation to replenish our shelves. This is a friendly competition between the 8:30am and 10:15am worship services that will restock the food shelf. The Wednesday night service will have a race to see who gets the most donations in the names of either Pastor Joanna, Pastor Maria, or Will. The person honored with the most donations will receive the special reward of a pie in the face. We will keep a running total of donations and update you each week.



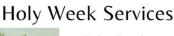




'Til All Are Fed Food Shelf is one of the avenues Grace offers to help the congregation cultivate the love of Jesus and connect with our community through food.









Palm Sunday April 13, 2025 8:30am Worship 10:15am Worship



Maundy Thursday April 17, 2025 1:00pm Worship 7:00pm Worship



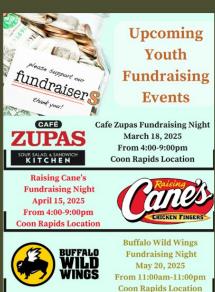
Good Friday April 18, 2025 1:00pm Worship 7:00pm Worship



















High school youth (grades 9-12, including incoming 9th graders) are invited to join a service project trip to Chicago from June 21st to 28th, organized by Praying Pelican Missions. Transportation will be provided via large 12-15 passenger vans.





Summer Stretch is a vibrant ministry for students in grades 4-5, operating every Thursday from July 10 to August 14, 9:00 AM to 5:00 PM. Participants must be dropped off and picked up at Grace Lutheran Church, with activities including service projects and recreational outings each week.





During a week in summer, teens can escape everyday life, bond with peers from the Midwest, and engage in discussions about God. Daily speakers share inspiring stories, and the camp offers diverse activities, including music, movies, and games, ensuring a fun experience filled with laughter and meaningful moments. Grace Lutheran Church 13655 Round Lake Blvd. NW Andover, MN 55304

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