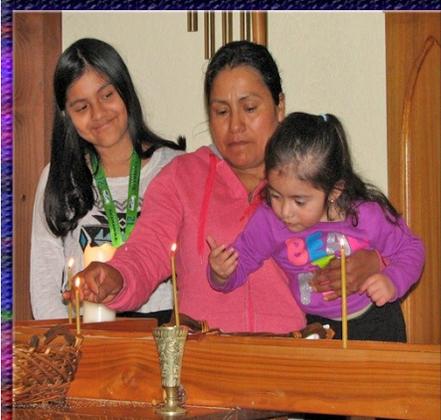


El Camino de Emaús

“With your church in all times and places, and with the sound of our Latin American music, the salsa of the Carribean, the mariachis of Mexico, the marimbas of Central America, the flutes of the Andes, and the accordions of Tex-Mex we glorify and praise your name!”



How fitting that, with these words, the worshipping Latino community of El Camino de Emaús concludes the Great Thanksgiving and lifts voices to sing “Santo, Santo, Santo!” In the few weeks I’ve been attending their 12:00 pm worship, I have come to appreciate the power of a liturgy that is shaped by cultural identity. They are an immigrant people who face challenges I cannot imagine; who experience social rejection, economic inequality and political oppression I will never know. Yet they welcome me with open arms and treat me as part of their family. All the hardships they have faced and struggles they continue to encounter only make them stronger, stronger in their identity, in their determination to make their place in our communities and schools, and most of all in their faith.

Because they know what it means to be an Exodus people, they can celebrate Resurrection Life with great joy. Easter Worship was held under a pear tree in Pastor Emilio Benitez’ back yard and followed by a potluck feast of Latin American food. The top two pictures were taken on Pascua. And, because Jesus was the greatest advocate of immigrants, the oppressed, the outcast, and the poor, they can pray with confidence, “En vida, en muerte, en vida mas allá de la muerte, Dios esta con nosotros. No estamos solos, demos Gracias a Dios.” (In life, in death, in life beyond death, God is with us. We are not alone. Thanks be to God!)

When I first contacted El Camino through their website, it was to ask if the worship service was held in English or Spanish—important because my Spanish was limited to Hola, Gracia, and Una cerveza, por favor! Pastor Emilio responded immediately with assurances that the written liturgy was in both Spanish and English and all would be eager to greet me. On my first Sunday Emilio had arranged for a translator to sit with me and help me with the scripture texts as well as the sermon. Still, I was nervous until we came to the sharing of the peace. Confident that I could manage “La Paz de Christo,” I reached out my hand to the woman in front of me. But she brushed it away and instead wrapped her arms around me in one of the best hugs I’ve ever had in church! That’s when I learned my first Spanish lesson: peace is shared with hugs, not handshakes, and I love it! I also love the way they say the Prayers of the People. The prayer is printed in the bulletin, and each petition is read by a different person. During this time, the congregation is invited to light candles that are then placed in the sand which fills a large wooden cross laid out horizontally on a table. You can see this in the bottom two pictures.

I asked Pastor Emilio to share his vision for El Camino de Emaús. His primary goal is to empower Latino Lutheran leaders to share in the ministry of Word and Sacrament, to support a growing youth ministry and Christian education program, be advocates for human rights, and serve the poor in their immigrant community. He stressed his hope that his people will not become assimilated by our American culture, but be integrated into it. He explained the subtle difference between ‘assimilate’ and ‘integrate’: in the former, the people adopt the culture and customs of their new community; in the latter, they retain their identity as an immigrant people but become an active part of the community with full access and full standing as equals. His second passion is for our Latino youth and he is involved in advocacy and leadership in programs that provide educational opportunities via summer camps and after school enrichment. Emilio is tireless in his efforts to help these kids succeed. Find out more about one of his pet projects here: <https://www.skagitfae.org/>. Pastor Emilio is currently seeking a musician who can lead the youth in vocal and/or instrumental music. It’s a great place to volunteer or visit. I also invite you to join me some Sunday at noon. Come and see what God is doing in your neighborhood.

Finally, a big thank you to Pastor Scott  for telling me about El Camino!

~Ellen