

“Vayan con Dios”

Rev. Erika Martinez-Flores
Isaiah 26.3-4
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Westby UMC & Viroqua UMC
Last Sunday

My friends, my dear friends, to say goodbye is certainly not easy, especially when it comes to a journey as intense as ours. We lived unique moments driven by a single hope: the eternal promise of our God. The truth is that it was not easy for anyone.

During these five years you closely followed my limitations and weaknesses. But we also grew and learned together about the grace of God and how it has sustained us even in the most intense and challenging moments.

I remember many stories, some good, some tragic, stories of divine provision and stories of divine correction, powerful manifestations of God and heroic acts of faith by many of you. We have witnessed the beauty of God's provision and have seen miracles with our own eyes.

While some moments were challenging, they also resulted in growth and maturity, and I firmly believe that God has been molding us as his people and has been preparing us to enjoy his promises. I can see that the future is much brighter and clearer for you. Your dedication, your generosity, your love for God, your love for your community of faith and your efforts will be rewarded.

The words of the Prophet Isaiah have been echoing in my mind the last few weeks. Words that inspire, encourage and invite his people to remain and be perseverant in the sweet but at the same time challenging Word of God; not to lose focus on the message of love and justice of the gospel and to trust perpetually in God.

When we refer to the concept of Peace, this can refer to a social or personal sphere. Although most of the times that I have spoken about peace I have pointed more to the social sphere; on this occasion I want to refer to a more personal or, rather, ecclesial sphere.

It is no mystery to anyone that the concern for sustaining our church and fulfilling our commitments has often kept us awake at night. But look carefully at what Isaiah tells us: The Lord of Peace, who has control in his hands, who is our support and our provider; assures us that we should not worry, that we can be calm, in peace.

Obviously, this does not mean that we should sit and wait for God to fulfill his promises. What it means is that we should be confident in what we do: the plans, the projects, the programs, all the hard work will prosper through his grace and mercy.

But there is something else, essential and powerful: that our mind is focused on pleasing and following what God commands us and, to always trust, ALWAYS, perpetually.

Keep the Word of God in your heart and consequently “constant peace,” “perfect peace” or “complete peace” will be a reality for all of you. In other words, those who trust completely in Jehovah enjoy inner peace, a feeling of calm that does not depend on their circumstances but depends on having a close friendship with Jehovah and striving to do the things that please him.

I hope to be remembered beyond trying to burn down the church. I know that what I did was not enough, but I also know that the little I did was motivated by my love for God and my desire to serve you with love.

I wanted to transmit my passion for my culture, my concern for the suffering of God's creation and the importance of each one of us doing what is necessary to transform our world. I hope that the seed that has been planted will become a beautiful tree that will give shade and shelter to all who seek it.

Thank you for your love, patience, friendship. Thank you God for allowing me to be part of your story, thank you for letting me serve you. I would like to end with the words of the other apostles: Paul, John, George and Ringo.

There are places I'll remember

All my life though some have changed

Some forever not for better

Some have gone and some remain
All these places have their moments
With lovers and friends I still can recall
Some are dead and some are living
In my life I've loved them all
But of all these friends and lovers
There is no one compares with all of you
And these memories lose their meaning
When I think of love as something new
Though I know I'll never lose affection
For people and things that went before
I know I'll often stop and think about them
In my life I love you more
Though I know I'll never lose affection
For people and things that went before
I know I'll often stop and think about them
In my life I love all of you more
In my life I love all of you more.

Gracias, Vayan con Dios