

**February 25, 2024 2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday of Lent**

**Rev. Jen Nagel, University Lutheran Church of Hope**

**Genesis 17:1-7, 15-16, Psalm 22:23-31**

**Romans 4:18-21, Mark 8:31-35**

[Solito, A Memoir, by Javier Zamora, pages 40-41, 381. Ideas and phrases from Kirsten Mebust, Nicholas Tangen (sermon 2-28-21), and my own sermon from 2-25-18.]

**Grace and peace, love and solidarity, to you, beloved of Christ Jesus. Amen.**

**Solito** is Javier Zamora's memoir of migrating to the United States from El Salvador in 1999, when Zamora was 9 years old.

The Spanish word Solito, in English means Alone.

Javier Zamora migrated alone, on his own.

Yes, he was going from his abuelo and abuelita, his grandparents, and his aunt, and extended family, going to his parents who he misses desperately, daily, who were already in, as he calls it, La USA. And, yes, an assortment of coyotes guide him and a group of others over these 3,000 harrowing miles from El Salvador, through Guatemala and Mexico, across the US southern border.

And yet Javier Zamora was solito, he was alone.

Now an adult, now a poet, Zamora begins to process in great detail what he experienced as a boy... and this honest, vulnerable, powerful book is birthed.

**I read Solito last summer and was grateful to hear** that our congregation's Racial Justice Team, and Sanctuary/Immigration Team and Book Group, are inviting us as a congregation, as a community, to read it this spring, for I found it was profound and moving and so important.

I hope you'll track down a copy of Solito to read..

**These backpacks that we bless** today have had me recalling the backpack Zamora carries on his journey.

The first coyote, the first guide in the journey, has explained in great detail what is needed.

In the early morning of the day he will depart his family in El Salvador,

with the sky still indigo and the rooster crowing, grandma kisses young Javier awake.

He writes, "Next to the hard-boiled eggs, avocado, queso duro, and tortillas, a black backpack [rests].

Inside it: a dark T-shirt, black pants, two pairs of underwear, an extra pair of shoes,

the plastic toothbrush, a comb, soccer shorts, Colgate toothpaste,

a bar of Palmolive soap, Head & Shoulders shampoo,

and another dark-blue, short-sleeved dress shirt.

There's a notebook, Bik pens, pencils, and the assignments my teachers gave me."

His granny and aunt help him bath and dress, eat breakfast.

"Then," he writes, "they make the cross over my forehead, over my head, over my entire body.

Wiping my tears with their hands."

And his abuelo, his grandfather, walks him out and his journey north begins.

**Beloved ones, so many threads run through our readings this morning:**

God's promise and way of blessing Abraham and Sarah with family, with generations.

Paul's reminder of hoping against hope.

Jesus' conversation with his confused disciples:

if you want to be my followers, take up your cross, follow me.

We've often heard this, maybe even used it, as a bit of a martyr's line: "that's my cross to bear."

There's more here, my friends. More liberation. More love.

The cross is not so much a stand-in for our sins as it is the symbol of the challenge of love.

How do we remain open to the places in our lives, in our world, where there is suffering?

Open to a deeper love for ourselves and for one another?

Open to acting in solidarity with our neighbors and those who are suffering?

Truth is, we don't often choose our crosses, but rather when we're open, we surrender to them.

Deep in their bones, Javier's family knows this suffering and knows, too, this promise.

Instead of muscling through, letting our guilt and shame overtake, overthinking, and rethinking,

maybe Jesus meets us in the places of suffering—our suffering, our neighbors suffering—

and gently opens us with a beautiful mix of courage and vulnerability, letting go and taking up.

**These backpacks that we bless today,**

even the notes of solidarity and love that we write during our worship this morning,

these will be given to men who are about to be deported,

as they are taken by ICE officials on flights from MSP back to the southern border,

in many cases, leaving behind kids and spouses, jobs and responsibilities.

The details of the supplies, the tingly feeling of nerves, tearful prayers, the trauma and fear and loss,

they remind me of Javier Zamora's journey northbound.

Our immigration system is so very broken,

and human need, survival, instinct, faith and hope, are so very real.

Each of us, in different ways glimpse this struggle, dips into solidarity:

bringing supplies, preparing backpacks, writing notes,

sitting in on immigration cases at the Whipple Building,

visiting those in detention centers like in Sherburn,  
providing dental and medical care in clinics near the border,  
befriending, sharing meals and prayers, accompanying, and believing,  
advocating, collaborating,  
journeying in solidarity as a way of loving, a way of taking up the cross.

These backpacks are a reminder of our solidarity and Christ's love unto death that holds each of us.

**In Solito, Javier Zamora writes of the ones he met along the way.**

The young man who protected him like a brother.

The mom who day and night cared for him as her own.

The fellow who carried him in the desert when he could no longer walk on his own.

These ones who sacrificed water and food, security, creating family.

At the end, he writes, "I never found out what happened to Chele,

or to any of the countless others who were with me.

I fear they died in the ... Desert.

This book is for them and for every immigrant who has crossed, who has tried to,  
who is crossing right now, and who will keep trying."

**Dear one, our Lenten journey is a journey of solidarity with the struggles around and within us.**

Remember the tearful crosses Javier's family makes as he departs?

Crosses marked on his forehead, over his head, around his entire body?

We are not alone.

This is a journey of love, love deeper, higher, broader than our imagination.

This is Jesus' liberating love for you and for me,

for kids like Javier Zamora and families struggling in impossible situations.

May God bless this solidarity, this love, this Lenten journey of life and death and life anew.

**PAUSE**

**On Wednesday morning, long time Hope member, Jeanette Haltli, died.**

As we do when members of this community die, I'll share a little about Jeanette and then we'll pray.

**The first of seven children, Jeanette lived** much of her life in the Twin Cities, attending St. Rose of Lima Catholic School and Alexander Ramsey High School.

She married Bob Haltli in 1966.

Bob's family has been members at Hope for generations, and Jeanette became part of this community too. Jeanette and Bob welcomed twin babies who did not survive, and then four children with lots of Hope connections: Sons Greg, Jeff, and Doug, and daughter Tami Felling and her kids Nick, Josh and Kelsey.

**Jeanette and Bob were deeply involved with their kids and grandkids and their activities,**  
and care for Doug with his special needs.

They kept him at home with them for as long as they could.

Bob and Jeanette enjoyed traveling, and ran a number of small businesses.

In the 90s, they built a home near Dalton, in western Minnesota, and later moved there.

Bob died in 2011, and as Jeanette's memory declined, she moved back to the Cities for care.

Jeanette was known for her smile, her big laugh, and her joy of chatting over coffee.

**When members of this congregation die,**

we remember how the waters that first washed over them in baptism, hold them now in death.

We pray at the baptismal waters, linking ourselves to God's powerful waters of promise.

**Holy God, holy and powerful, we remember before you today our sister Jeanette Ann Haltli. We thank you for giving her to us to know and to love as a companion in our pilgrimage on earth. At these waters of baptism, you welcomed her into your love. At these waters, you comforted her in times of trouble and encouraged her in delight. At these waters, you now enfold her into Jesus' death and resurrection and the promise of life everlasting. Console us who mourn and bring us together to feast with Jeanette and all the saints at rest. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.**