During the fifth Sunday of Lent, in John’s gospel, we listen to Jesus teaching his disciples about death. Jesus tells them, “unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit” (John 12:24, NRSV). Then Jesus continues, reminding them that not everything that needs to die is a seed. If we are to gain eternal life, we must first lose our lives, dying to ourselves in this world.

The ultimate story of the Christian tradition is a story of death and resurrection. Lent reminds us that before we get to Easter, we must first embrace death. Ash Wednesday liturgies are filled with reminders of our mortality. Baptismal liturgies, tracing their history to the early church, invite the newly baptized to first be buried with Christ, as they are immersed in the water, before they are raised to new life.

M. Craig Barnes, president of Princeton Theological Seminary, suggests, “The rationale for this burial form of baptism was to make the members of the church go through ‘dying’ and get it over with. Once they were no longer anxious about Caesar’s persecutions of the church, they were free to boldly proclaim the gospel. You can’t scare dead people.”

I love that reminder. You can’t scare dead people. When we freely offer our lives to follow Jesus, there is nothing for us to fear.

On Ash Wednesday, this year, we invited our active new faith community pastors and several other members of our NFC community, to consider our tradition of death and resurrection. We invited them to ask themselves, what needs to die in me and in my church for new life to spring forth this year? This newsletter shares the stories of two churches in our annual conference and how their personal journey of letting things die in themselves and in their churches is leading to new life in their congregations and communities.

But not everything that needs to die is a seed.
An order of laity and clergy dedicated to embodying apostolic hospitality for new people to be gathered into communion with Jesus Christ.

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