

February is almost here, and I have been thinking about... succulents. Desert plants. Things that do not grow outdoors here in winter. I find myself considering the life of the cactus, or aloe, or jade tree. Jade trees were introduced to me by my cousin Willa's grandfather. One of his largest jade trees came to live with us, and we have been caring for it for more than a decade. Part of a larger plant family that includes prickly things, the jade tree likes to be watered infrequently. It gathers and stores water in its leaves, which are shiny when healthy. If you are lucky and don't look too hard, your care might be rewarded with tiny clusters of pinkish white flowers in the winter, but only some years. Like other succulents, you can grow more jade tree plants by tucking fallen leaves into a smaller pot of soil; bits we have planted over the years have now grown to the same size as the original gift tree. Generations of jade trees fill our sunroom in the winter, and several are living in my office at Saint Paul, basking in the sunlight from the south.

The plants I am pondering store up their strength from desert rains to help them make it through a long summer; they give me hope for us as we rely on our personal reserves to make it through a long winter. Spring is coming, and we do have what we need not just to make it but to thrive until the earth awakens.

In our faith life, I think there are also times we store up spiritual reserves to help us through other more difficult times. I find that weekend worship at Saint Paul helps me to reset for the week ahead. Hearing Pastor Marta share about her weekly meditation time with our preschoolers gives me hope for all of us. Working with our friends in the African congregation to help them meet United Methodists who share their language helps any day feel more sunny.

As we move into the season of Lent, we will consider stories of people who journeyed in the desert and who found life and refreshment in the midst of harsh conditions. I think our calling as people of faith is to learn from their stories, to draw from our resources and continue to grow in faith as we journey together. I have a forest of jade trees that remind me that from the tiniest leaf can come the healthiest blooming plant. I invite you to join me in drawing from the unexpected richness around us in this coming season.

Rev Stephanie