

The GATHERING

"Do not be afraid, for I am with you, I will bring your children from the east and gather you from the west"

—Isaiah 43:5-7

Tree of Life

They start lining up at 7 a.m. at 630 Sansome Street—pressed against the building for shelter from the wind that whips through downtown San Francisco. They're here for ICE check-ins. An hour early, because lateness can trigger devastating consequences.

It's early in the second term of our current U.S. President, before we were organized with signs and songs, and sometimes clowns to lighten the mood. It's just my partner and me. I hold a spot for someone I've never met. When he arrives (let's call him Luis), we tell him we can't go inside but will wait and pray. We promise to text every ten minutes so he knows he's not alone. None of us say what we all know: he might not come out.



At 8 a.m., Luis shows his papers and disappears through the door. We begin our vigil, stomping our feet to stay warm. *From the east I'll bring your children; from the west I'll gather you.* We stand like trees by the water, Trees of Life.

Five times we text. His replies are brief but deeply relieving: *Sigo esperando. Todavía no me han trasladado a una habitación pequeña.* ("I'm still waiting. They haven't moved me to a small room.") Such a move would alert us of impending deportation. Six times. Seven times. And then—he emerges! Our hearts leap. "Luis!" We embrace, giddy with relief. He'll go to work now, thankfully having missed just over an hour's pay. Tonight, he'll return to his family.

image: original artwork by Pat Plude

Like trees standing by the water, we stood with him through one of his most vulnerable hours. Trees of Life. Do not fear. We are with you

Question

How have you been a Tree of Life for those navigating deeply vulnerable circumstances?



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