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I was only nine years old at the time, but I joined half a billion people around the world in July of 1969 as we watched humans do something for the very first time. Anyone remember what that was? ... Neil Armstrong and Buzz Aldrin landed and walked on the moon while Michael Collins orbited the moon waiting for them to return. Little did I know at the time that Aldrin had taken a communion kit with him, a gift from his church. He later wrote:

I opened the little plastic packages which contained the bread and the wine. I poured the wine into the chalice our church had given me. In the one-sixth gravity of the moon, the wine slowly curled and gracefully came up the side of the cup. Then I read the Scripture, 'I am the vine, you are the branches. Whosoever abides in me will bring forth much fruit...I ate the tiny host and swallowed the wine. I gave thanks for the intelligence and spirit that had brought two young pilots to the Sea of Tranquility.'<sup>1</sup>

As a nine year old, I had no idea how many people were involved in getting those three men to the moon—the “team of four hundred thousand people that put them there. They were the flight directors, controllers, planners, and engineers; the rocket designer and builders and technicians; the managers, supervisors, quality control and safety inspectors; the programmers, electricians, welders, seamstresses, gluers, painters, doctors, geologists, scientists, trainers, and navigators...”<sup>2</sup>

Aldrin’s reading of the passage from John’s Gospel reflected how many people had to be connected together to get that team to the moon, just as grapes must be connected to the vine in order to work together to create wine. Although Jesus may have never imagined his words being spoken on the moon, he understood what it meant to be connected together through him as he spoke to his disciples:

Live in me. Make your home in me just as I do in you. In the same way that a branch can’t bear

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grapes by itself but only by being joined to the vine, you can't bear fruit unless you are joined with me. I am the Vine, you are the branches. When you're joined with me and I with you, the relation intimate and organic, the harvest is sure to be abundant. Separated, you can't produce a thing.<sup>3</sup>

Last weekend as ten of us from Crossroads joined five other churches for the Dare to Lead program, one speaker referred to the African word Ubuntu, which reminded us how much we are interconnected and tangled together, as grapes to a vine:

Ubuntu speaks particularly about the fact that you can't exist as a human being in isolation. It speaks about our interconnectedness. You can't be human all by yourself, and when you have this quality – Ubuntu – you are known for your generosity. We think of ourselves far too frequently as just individuals, separated from one another, whereas you are connected and

what you do affects the whole World. When you do well, it spreads out; it is for the whole of humanity.<sup>4</sup> (Archbishop Desmond Tutu)

Sometimes being part of the vine means we get tangled in one another's lives, that we experience the joys and sorrows of each other. When someone offers a prayer concern for a friend going through cancer treatments, we sense the pain in the lives of those touched by cancer. When we hear that a new birth has occurred within our congregation, together we experience the joy and excitement.

Amy Gopp, the director for Week of Compassion, expresses this interconnectedness using another image of what she calls the “domino effect,” how when one person experiences joy in life, it ripples into the rest of our lives. She suggests that the joy we experience by helping others spreads:

We begin to see ourselves as part of all of God's children everywhere. We come to understand that others who happen to be in need are not

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simply recipients of our charity, but sisters and brothers with whom we are called to live justly and share abundantly. We recognize our abundance as a gift from God, and are more willing to let go of the fear of scarcity that can inhibit our generosity. Joy-filled sharing shows that our hearts and hands are open — open to giving that fosters restoration of shalom — open to generosity that speaks of God’s love. When we cannot physically go to meet needs in person, our gifts go together to assist others. Knowing we willingly share with them, others are reminded of who they are: beloved children of the Creator.<sup>5</sup>

When we see each of ourselves as one domino toppling over in joy, or as a grape connected to one another through the vine of Jesus, we begin to see how the stories in one part of the world connect to us, such as the children who often pay the highest price for wars and conflict. Children who are orphaned or abandoned...who

are unwelcome refugees in unfamiliar communities...children who are prey to child trafficking rings.

These are the children Week of Compassion helps support in Chisinau (KEESH-ee-now), Moldova, [which is about an 18-hour drive south of Lithuania where Vyganté lives] where a Church World Service-founded emergency center provides medical and psychological care, education and, most of all, love. It’s a safe haven for children waiting to be adopted or placed in foster family homes like that of Victor Rotaru, who sees no difference between his five biological and six foster children. For him, they are “all from God.”

With Week of Compassion support, Victor and his children have begun raising chickens, selling the meat and eggs to their community school and a boarding school for children with serious disabilities. Seeing how hard his father works for the family, 14-year-old Kosta plans to

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go to college and study economics: “I hope I can develop my own ideas, helping our business to grow.”<sup>6</sup>

Whether here in our church or somewhere across the globe, we are all tangled together within God’s love. So whether you see yourself as a

domino that joyfully topples into another person and spreads joy, or as a grape on a vine connected through Jesus, may you continue to share God’s joy as we continue our journey to Easter.

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<sup>1</sup> Bill Carrell, [godandscience.org/apologetics/communion.html](http://godandscience.org/apologetics/communion.html)

<sup>2</sup> Catherine Thimmesch, *Team Moon: How 400,000 People Landed Apollo 11 on the Moon*, 2006.

<sup>3</sup> Peterson, E. H. (2005). *The Message: The Bible in contemporary language* (Jn 15:4-5). Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress.

<sup>4</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ubuntu\\_\(philosophy\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ubuntu_(philosophy))

<sup>5</sup> 2013 Planning and Resource Guide, Week of Compassion.

<sup>6</sup> 2013 Planning and Resource Guide, Week of Compassion.