

June 13, 2021 The Gardener Genesis 2:15-25

Dearly Beloved;

A week ago, I said that things could change and that they would probably do so rapidly. In the time of Covid-19 that is simply the way of it. Example: when I wrote those words I did not have an appointment for my second shot of vaccine. On Monday of this past week, we did arrange 2nd doses, in Peterborough, for the end of the month. Within a matter of days it became possible to get the 2nd dose locally (Belleville) and as I sit down to write, both Barbara and I have had 2 doses of the Pfizer vaccine, and have managed to cancel the Peterborough appointments, so that they could be made available to someone else.

We will be returning to in person worship soon. I cannot say how soon. It is a matter of church law that only the Session can set times for worship. Wheels are turning. The Session will meet on Thursday June 17th at 7:00 pm. On the 20th I hope to make an announcement. Barbara has been waiting for a knee replacement surgery for over a year. It has just been rescheduled for June 24th, so that will have to be taken into consideration as part of the resumption of in person worship discussions. Please remember Barbara and I, and the Session in your prayers. With that we will turn to the message for this day, followed by our celebration of the Lord's Supper.

In Genesis 2:7 we are told God created the man Adam from the dust of the ground. That the man became a living soul, is the explanation that answers the question, why

does mankind seek God and spiritual answers to the big questions of existence. God breathed life into our nostrils, and we became what we are. At one and the same time we are capable of great faith, and deeds of goodness. We have a natural hunger for relationship with our Creator, Sustainer and Saviour. I can remember as a teenager, discovering not only the life of faith, but the God who is, and HIS word as sustenance for my mind, my spirit, and the pursuit of my destiny. I am tempted to add, and so here we are. You and I and all the other people who have crossed my path, and journeyed down the road together seeking answers to life's biggest questions, and finding fulfillment in the service of others.

My point is, that the book of Genesis, answers a lot of questions for men and women, boys and girls. It is not just about values, although, values are clearly important as we seek to be people in community, shaped around the faith that has been passed down to us in this time, and space. It is a profound insight, that the era in which this pandemic has occurred is one in which there is both a great deal of faithlessness, on the one hand, and a stubborn holding on to faith on the other. I see it every day as I check the Covid numbers and can only do so by absorbing the information on the number of stabbings, violent crimes of all sorts, and of course the number of murders that have occurred in the last 24 hours, to say nothing of the accidental deaths and mayhem people have inflicted on one another.

I understand that the contradictions of life are placed before us daily, challenging our ability to believe in a loving, caring, saving God, and to hold on to our very sanity. Has that not been one of the great challenges of the pandemic, in which so many have lost their lives, and so many have died needlessly. Through the carelessness of our breathing, sharing the air, our failure to wear a face covering, our failure to take seriously keeping 6 feet apart, the virus has claimed more than 33.5 million lives around the globe! And the inability to even safely bury our dead.

It is the book of Genesis that also supplies the answer to the question, why this passion in the Spring of the year to till a patch of ground and plant some seeds, watering and fertilizing, in order to eat some vegetables that are fresher than any food that comes into our nation by land, sea, or air. It turns out we have been gardeners from birth, from the time of creation's flowering under the umbrella of the grace of God. Who knew? You might even think, who would have asked?

In verses 8 and 15 of Genesis 2, we barely notice the significance of the statement, "God put the man he had formed in the garden." (vs. 8) And then "HE put him in the garden to work it and take care of it." (vs. 15) The garden is a place of destiny and grace. It is not just a hobby, it is work, labour. My father used to say he longed for a time when he could spend as much time in his garden as it needed. His day job kept getting in the way of his desire to prepare for all the veggies he could grow, along with roses, and peonies and

baby's breath. (And a host of other flowers, and flowering bushes.)

There is something precious about getting your hands dirty working the earth, preparing the soil for the planting of the seeds, or transplanting the things you started from seeds in a cold frame or a greenhouse. I have never had a greenhouse. But I started cabbages, cauliflower, and brussels sprouts in a cold frame in New Liskeard. When it snowed and froze I was sure I had lost everything I had started. But when it warmed up and I lifted the window, even the tomato plants were fine, prospering and promising to produce once planted out and watered.

The garden is work. But, and this is no small point, the garden needs care. That was why God in HIS wisdom put the man in the garden. As surely as the man needed to be cared for (the grace of God surrounds us even when we fail to notice it at all!), the man is required to provide care, an imitation of the grace of God, for the garden, for the earth, for the planet.

There are those who say we are a little late in coming to an awareness that the soil under our feet, the air we need to breathe, and the water we need to drink, need to be cared for by we who live in the garden. But there it is. It was a primary directive to man in the hour of his birth. To care for the ecosystem, and the systems that not only surround him, but which provide the very food that keeps him alive. It is the

Genesis insight that the systems of the creation are not separate systems, they are together a super system which supports life itself, including our individual lives. The connections are real. And the challenge of the 21st century may well be to not only fully recognize that reality, but to take up the calling which was ours at the beginning of time, to care for all the parts of the system of life.

What humanity brings to the story of creation, is a gardener, who is indeed, willing to get his hands dirty, doing the work that keeps things clean and healthy, leaving as small a footprint on the earth, the air, the water, the plants and animals and trees and fish as he can. It is a huge responsibility. One of the lessons of Covid-19 and its ability to produce variants, is that if we are careless.....millions can perish....and the whole system can be undone, bringing upon ourselves and our loved ones, pain, sickness and death.

And are we really surprised that the work of a gardener has a positive effect not only on the earth, the air and the water, the seeds we sow becoming blessings about us, but the work of caring for the environment...we garden, as farmers have always known, where we live. We garden at ground zero of where we live...backyards, frontyards, sideyards too, the work has an effect not just on our muscles, and our skin, but our hearts and our minds. I may say with my mouth that I don't like the work in the garden, especially the constant weeding, lugging and lifting, but there is a peace that comes of that work that seldom is found in anything else I do. It is so basic, to the

reset of our minds and our souls, to recognize what we are a part of and party too.

Next week? Wally Mayhew will be providing the message. But now it is time to celebrate the Lord's Supper. We are at the end of Spring time, and the beginning of summer. So let us begin. For those reading this message the Lord's Supper is a simple act of remembrance. The wine, juice or water is a reminder of Jesus blood shed on the cross. The bread or even a saltine cracker is a reminder of Jesus body broken on the cross to redeem us from our sin. Take the bread, remember Jesus and eat it. Lift your glass, remember Jesus shed blood. Drink it. And say thank you. Let us pray....

Lord you remind us we are your children, your chosen people. You remind us that we have a responsibility to help others bear the burdens of their lives. Help us to recognize and love all whom we meet as brothers and sisters on a journey. Feed our faith that we might share it. Help us to be light in the midst of an all too dark world. In Jesus name we pray. Amen