

## **Seedy Sunday**

**Luke 24:44-53 by Patty Friesen (May 1/16)**

When Nelson Mandela was in prison in South Africa for twenty-seven years, he tended a garden. He would don his straw hat and gloves and work for two hours every morning. He wrote, "I grew onions, eggplant, cabbage, cauliflower, beans, spinach, carrots, cucumbers, broccoli, beets, lettuce, tomatoes, peppers, strawberries and much more. The guards gave me seeds for the vegetables they liked and they brought satchels at harvest time for their fresh vegetables. A garden was one of the few things in prison I could control. To plant a seed, watch it grow, to tend it and then harvest it, offered a simple but enduring satisfaction. The sense of being the custodian of this small patch of earth offered a small taste of freedom. The garden became a metaphor for my leadership in the African National Congress as well. A leader also plants seeds, then watches, cultivates and hopefully harvests the results."

Nelson Mandela had to wait twenty-seven years to harvest his dream of an interracial government in South Africa. His gardening disciplines of mind and spirit, together with the prayers and non-violent training of Christians under Bishop Desmond Tutu and the miracle of God's grace and timing led to a rich harvest of democracy and equal sharing for all South Africans. (Long Walk to Freedom)

Today is May Day, when countries in the northern hemisphere celebrate spring and planting and we just blessed some seeds during children's time. In the Christian calendar, it is also Ascension Sunday. In today's scripture, Luke gathers under the authority of scripture, not only the death and resurrection of Christ but also his mission to all nations. Earlier in Luke 24, on the walk to Emmaus, the disciples eyes were opened

when Jesus described from scripture who he was and what was his purpose. In Luke 6, Jesus commissioned his disciples to act in his name and does so again now. The disciples are witnesses, eyewitnesses because they accompanied Jesus in his ministry. They were there for the feedings and healings and witnessed his death and resurrection and grasped in faith their meaning.

The language of sending recurs frequently in Luke. Jesus himself was sent into the world and now he sends the disciples. Luke is the only gospel that chronicles this departure of Jesus and records not one but two ascensions – one on Easter and one after 40 days in case we didn't get where Jesus went. These ascensions provide closure to Luke's gospel and give Jesus' authority from heaven. The gospel ends where it began in the temple and Jesus pronouncing a blessing on the disciples that God is the one who saves, sends and blesses us. The disciples returned to Jerusalem with great joy. It is that joy that plants the seeds of the gospel witness around the world.

The past two Sundays have been about Jesus painfully breaking up the sod of religious tradition and mixing in the brown compost of the old ways and the new green compost of the Holy Spirit. Seeds need a hospitable place to germinate and Jesus has been creating such new earth. Like new wine in new wineskins, he plants new seeds in newly plowed soil. Today souls are ready for planting the seeds of God's grace.

For gardeners, the joy of seeds comes with the spring seed catalogue that we pour over while it is still snowing outside. Stunning pictures of flowers and veg stir the soul and trick one into thinking our garden could look like that. We garden for the aesthetic beauty of it, for the health of fresh organic vegetables, for connection to the earth and to God.

For the first time in 20 years, I am without a garden this summer due to a garage project that has the yard torn up. In a panic, I was prepared to plant in all that quack grass east of the cemetery here at church but there wasn't time to get it ready. Kathy Boldt saved me with a 20x20 patch that I have promised to keep weeded on their farm. Under Terri Lynn's wise tutelage in urban gardening, the youth are planning lasagna beds by the church garage. Who knew you could grow lasagna? The youth have a market niche there. All this gardening has led to conversations about a community garden on church property, a grassroots movement, one might say. What could a community garden add to the village community and our own church community? These conversations have been thrilling and have generated many ideas on how to get rid of quack grass – the role of Round Up in our lives, water supplies and who gets to weed.

Linda Filippi who runs a community garden in Albuquerque, New Mexico says, "It is a radical act to garden. Most of our lives are mediated. Our food is grown somewhere else; we don't have much contact with the basic stuff of feeding ourselves. To plant seeds is a radical act in the fact of a culture that disconnects us with our food source. By planting we deepen relationship with food, the earth, God and each other.

Wendell Berry, farmer –poet writes, "In gardening, one works with the body to feed the body. The work, if it is knowledgeable makes for excellent food. And it makes one hungry. The work thus makes eating both nourishing and joyful and keeps the eater from getting fat. This is health, wholeness, a source of delight."

Diana Butler Bass in her new book *Grounded* writes about church gardens, "In the early 2000s, I spent most of my time researching vibrant churches. In the course of that work, I kept running across congregations with gardens – rural churches growing crops

for local food banks or homeless shelters or just to raise money to defray the pastor's salary! Across a denominational spectrum, congregations are raising food for charity, to supplement church budgets, to do justice, or just for the fun of it – turning food deserts into lively centers of local food movements.

The Garden Church of San Pedro, California, is pushing beyond growing food. The new congregation has a vision of church as a living sanctuary based in the earth itself. As its mission statements says: The Garden Church is reimagining church as an interconnected organism, worshipping, loving and serving together as we transform a plot of land into a vibrant urban garden where people encounter the Divine in community, scripture, nature and the life of useful service. The congregation has purchased an abused piece of land in a poor neighborhood and is working to renew the soil and plant a garden. There are no plans for a conventional building. When it's nice out, they will worship outside in the garden, a raised vegetable bed as the communion table. When it rains, the greenhouse will serve as worship space. Church leaders are called cultivators and members meet in both gardening and theology groups, learning soil and scripture as a pair. Which is what we will be doing this spring as we "ground" ourselves through Luke's agricultural images.

Popular Christianity has been taken out of this world, literally through the Heaven is for Real phenomenon. The family memoir about a child's vision of heaven has been a bestseller and movie hit making millions. The child's vision of heaven is a comfort for many. It confirms what we hope that we will see our loved ones and that heaven is a place of light, colour and amazing music. We need those assurances. But as Wendell Berry says if our faith is only based in the comforts of heaven, then our faith will not go

any further than how to get there. But if our faith is based in love, then love has to wear a face, and that face is on earth, in our neighbourhoods, our neighbours and other creatures, the earth and its inhabitants. If we believe God is as present on earth as in heaven, then our life on this earth calls forth how we live in relation to earth and the creatures on it, especially the human ones.

Let us ground our faith this spring in the intimate soil of our souls and what God is speaking to us there. Let us ground our faith in the faces of those around us whom we encounter firstly in our families and then in our neighbours and then in strangers we meet. Let us ground our faith in the God-given dirt under our feet and in the food that we put into our mouths at least three times a day that nourishes us for God's work. Let us pray...

Gracious God, in whom we live and move and have our being. You are the soil of our lives. Grow your seeds of your desires within us and bring them to good fruit in our relationships with those around us and our care of your earth. Amen.

Let us pray