

The Gardener God
June 13, 2021
Maple Grove UMC
Rev. Patricia Wagner

Psalm 8: 3-6

When I consider your heavens,
the work of your fingers,
the moon and the stars,
which you have set in place,

⁴ what is mankind that you are mindful of them,
human beings that you care for them?

⁵ You have made them^[a] a little lower than the angels^[c]
and crowned them^[d] with glory and honor.

⁶ You made them stewards over the works of your hands;
you put everything under their feet:

Genesis 2: 4-9, 15-19

In the day that the LORD God made the earth and the heavens, ⁵ when no plant of the field was yet in the earth and no herb of the field had yet sprung up—for the LORD God had not caused it to rain upon the earth, and there was no one to till the ground; ⁶ but a stream would rise from the earth, and water the whole face of the ground— ⁷ then the LORD God formed the human from the dust of the ground,^[b] and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and the human became a living being.

⁸ And the LORD God planted a garden in Eden, in the east; and there God put the human whom God had formed. ⁹ Out of the ground the LORD God made to grow every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food, the tree of life also in the midst of the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

¹⁵ The LORD God took the human and put him in the garden of Eden to till it and keep it. ¹⁶ And the LORD God commanded the human,

"You may freely eat of every tree of the garden; ¹⁷ but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat.

¹⁸ Then the LORD God said, "It is not good that the human should be alone; I will make him a helper as his partner." ¹⁹ Then out of the ground the LORD God formed every animal of the field and every bird of the air, and brought them to the human to see what he would call them; and whatever the human called every living creature, that was its name.

Beautiful World

from "The Apple Tree"

*Still it's possible a day may come,
When momentarily the world wears thin;
I fl weary of the world outside me,
I can always take a good look in.
For along with ev'ry cloud and cobweb.
I'm emphatic'ly a member of
This diversified, curious, fascinating bountiful,
Beautiful world*

When I say, "Old Testament God" what comes to mind? Judge? Warrior, King?

But in this primal story, about the beginning of everything we hear these words:

God planted a garden in the East. God is a gardener. Jesus didn't call God, King and himself a Prince. He said, "I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener." (John 15:1)

You know what that means, who a gardener is, what they do. You know this even if the extent of your gardening is limited to a seed that you once put in a cup of dirt back when you were 5.

A gardener's work is to help things live.

The Gardener is a planter, and protector and pruner and provider. And the Gardener of creations is one whose deepest concern is life's flourishing... is your life's, flourishing. Not to judge or rule or fight with you or for you. Not a distant, creator but a gardener: intimately engaged. in the soil of life. Ours, yours, mine.

But why? The psalmist pondered this, too:

When I survey this vast world, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars and all that you have established, what are mortals that you are mindful of us, human beings in our despair or joy or resentment or smallness of heart who are we that you care for us as a loving gardener?

Why is that the one who brought forth the stars and the meadow the swan and the black bear, the mango trees and the bumblebees also brought forth us, brought forth me, and you?

Genesis 2 says something about that, too. After the unfathomable beginnings of the first chapter, when everything is made in turn, day and night, heaven and earth, plant and creature and human, all named Good.

Then we come to this second chapter of Genesis, this second creation story where a human being is raised up from the earth, formed, from the very soil we walk upon to till and keep the garden of God.

That is it, according to Genesis 2, that's our simple, utterly astounding purpose.

What would it mean to claim this role, that we are made in the image of God, the Gardener, and that is our great purpose, our deepest concern, our reason for existing in *this diversified, curious, fascinating bountiful, beautiful, world*, is to till and keep. To support the flourishing of life.

What if that was the goal by which we measure everything, every decision we make, what food we eat, what we buy, how we treat loved ones and strangers, how we live as a nation, as a church?

Its hard work: this tilling, keeping, tending, nourishing. It can be overwhelming, even caring, tending to one person. Life is complicated and hurting is hard.

How shall we help life flourish? I think of Dayquan, who has spent the last three years in the county jail.

How has he survived in that barren place? He has not seen the blue sky nor walked the green earth in 3 years; but he has been loved by his sister and his grandmother and because of that love he has cultivated friendships with his guards, and he has gone deep into himself and learned humility, he says. Somehow God is at work in him and through those tending him, that, even in captivity, he might live.

And those of us who are facing decline in life, sorrowful situation, health problems that cannot be reversed. And here we learn another lesson that the God's garden is greater than that which we see, that there is a flourishing that that is deeper than death.

There was a powerful witness to that this week. A woman from Zanesville, Ohio stepped onto the stage of a talent show. She is 30, thin, waif-like, with ragged pants, the glittering judges sat before her. And she told them of the cancer in her spine and lungs and liver and her 2% chance of living. And she sang a song she wrote, a confession, "I'm a little lost, we're all a little lost," she said, "but it's alright, it's alright, it's alright, it's alright."

We can feel a little lost in life, and wonder: How shall we flourish, how shall our children? How shall the world when we care so little about one another. When we are busy being little warriors and kings and judges of one another.

We lose our sense of being planted in God's garden. We lose our sense of place, and thus, our deepest purpose, and so, our hope and our joy.

But its alright, says the Gardener God we find in Genesis and within our hearts: My deepest purpose is your flourishing and I am not leaving you, not in this life, this garden and not in the next.

So, join me, says the Lord of heaven and earth, in tilling and keeping, join God, says Julian of Norwich:

“be a gardener, dig a ditch, toil and sweat, turn the earth upside down and seek the deepness.”

And if you get discouraged, remember, as Todd sang today:

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For along with ev'ry cloud and cobweb.
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Amen