

You Shall Be Like a Watered Garden
Stories of Love and Transformation in Exile
Maple Grove UMC
June 20, 2021
Rev. Patricia Wagner

Scripture: Isaiah 58: 6-12

¹¹The LORD will guide you always;
he will satisfy your needs in a sun-scorched land
and will strengthen your frame.

You will be like a well-watered garden,
like a spring whose waters never fail.

¹²Your people will rebuild the ancient ruins
and will raise up the age-old foundations;
you will be called Repairer of Broken Walls,
Restorer of Streets to Live In

"Sometimes it takes a rainy day just to let you know everything's gonna be alright." Those words by Chris Williamson came to mind this week during our rain showers. It was grace made wet; the heavens taking care of the earth.

It seems we're struggling a bit to respond in kind.

The woman who has cut my hair for 18 years, half her life, told me she was leaving her job. *People are too mean right now*, she said. Not her regulars, but the new folks. *They are angry, impossible to please*. The salon owner told me that 3 others in that salon resigned in the last month; same reason.

I then went to the grocery store and asked the cashier and the man bagging my groceries, How have people been treating you? *People were*

really nice during the pandemic, but now, the lines are long sometimes, they didn't mind before, but now they are frustrated and mad at us.

Donnie, one of the Divine Hands Cleaning team that are handling some of our cleaning now, he cleaned this sanctuary last Monday.

Well, Donnie was at the gas station on Thursday and someone just started shooting and hit him in the foot now he's got a cast on it, and can't work.

Maple Grove should start a kindness movement. Tell our friends, wear buttons, but that's really an old movement, and heard about it in Isaiah, Chapter 58.

It's third Isaiah, the people are now home from exile and they are back in synagogue practicing their rituals, like prayer and fasting.

But on the day of fasting, you are oppressing your workers and serve your own interest. You pray then end up quarreling and fighting.

What's up with that? Didn't you learn anything in exile about what is important?

During our exile, there was so much that we couldn't and still can't take for granted:

Our health, a hospital bed, cleaning supplies, food stocks, treatment, human touch and company, faces.

Our elders, our first responders and front-line workers, schools and teachers, our church, our congregation.

And now that we are returning from a sort of exile to our city as we knew it, perhaps we are struggling too to remember how it felt to be thankful for each day's provision. For one more day of not being sick.

Perhaps it's easy to be impatient, to be careless with others, to use whatever power we have to our advantage.

Isaiah says that the Lord wants one sort of sacrifice from us: to loosen the chains of injustice, to untie the cords of the yoke, to set the oppressed free, to break every yoke.

To share our food with the hungry, provide the poor wanderer with shelter, to clothe the naked and not turn away from our own kin.

And if we do...

If we do... that sounds rather conditional, doesn't it? I thought rain falls on the just and unjust.

Yes, says Isaiah, but yet if we follow the commandment, take in the poor, treat those without power with respect, care for the orphaned, the kids in foster care etc. If we come out of exile and respond to God's grace with grace and mercy and righteousness, then, says Isaiah, "The LORD will guide you always; satisfy your needs in a sun-scorched land and will strengthen your frame.

And You will be like a well-watered garden, like a spring whose waters never fail.

Your people will rebuild the ancient ruins and will raise up the age-old foundations; you will be called Repairer of Broken Walls, Restorer of Streets to Live In.

What a wondrous pledge and I think you know somehow in our bones that it's true. That if we live as we've been shown that God will find a way to meet our need and strengthen our frame. And that, if we are tuned in to the source, we will be well-watered gardens, like springs whose waters never fail.

And because of this we will be known as those who repair the ruins, who restore the streets we live on.

When Michelle Murphy and Pam Temple moved into this part of Clintonville, they found themselves across the street from this guy, Milt Campbell, a member of Maple Grove.

Milt had who learned in his long life from his startup days in the farm in Oklahoma to his last days in this city, to be a gardener, not only of roses and hostas, but of neighbors. He restored not only their garden but the streets he dwelled in.

Video

We thank God for Milt, for neighborliness.

My father was a watered garden. I hope you have had a father, grandfather, uncle, friend, mentor, teacher, neighbor, who learned from life and helped you learn from yours to become yourself a spring.