

# The Patient Gardener

## 3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday of Lent

February 28<sup>th</sup>, 2016

A reflection by Peggy Jensen

Prayer: Creator God, we give you thanks for nurturing us into new life. With your care we can grow and be fruitful again. There are times when we feel unproductive and worthless. Then your nourishing, life giving, Spirit encourages us to try again. Help us to trust You and to be faithful believers. May the thoughts and words that we share be Your nourishment for us today. Amen.

Each of you received a dry twig when you arrived. If you wondering about the twig, hold onto it. Ask yourself if it is a symbol of possibility or uselessness?

Who likes to garden? Who is good at resurrecting plants? Have you started your Spring garden clean-up? We've had a wonderful week for getting out in the garden. Do you enjoy pulling out the dead stuff and to make room for the promising new growth? If you are a gardener you can relate to the parable for this morning, and if you are not a gardener come along anyway. Today's parable is about a gardener and a landowner but it is not clear who they represent.

*Then he told this parable: 'A man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard; and he came looking for fruit on it and found none. So he said to the gardener, "See here! For three years I have come looking for fruit on this fig tree, and still I find none. Cut it down! Why should it be wasting the soil?" He replied, "Sir, let it alone for one more year, until I dig round it and put manure on it. If it bears fruit next year, well and good; but if not, you can cut it down.'" ' Luke 13:1-9*

If the landowner is you and this faith community is the fig tree and God is the gardener....

The conversation might sound like this: *"It's been years that I have been coming to this church and every time I wonder why? The numbers are down. The singing is ... They can't decide what time to worship..... They can't even decide wine, or juice, wafers, or bread!!! There are too many complainers ..... Why don't they just shut the door and go to that enthusiastic church down the road?"*

What does the gardener say? **"Give it more time, I will dig around it and put manure on it."**

God is very patient. God, the gardener, is looking after this community of faith. God is generous and merciful, offering forgiveness and hope. God has not closed the door but has opened the doors and windows to let in the light and fresh air! We need to look and see the ways that God is turning over the soil, watering and feeding the plant that is your life and my life, the plant that we are all connected to in this community of faith.

Together we are working on the soil. Getting to know each other better. Enjoying worshipping together. Seeing what we have in common. Naming the possibilities here. The Transition team is planning some important congregation conversations, to help us understand each other better and to find fruitful ways to live and grow together. I hope you will mark your calendars! These are vital conversations to understand who we are and who God wants us to be. Your participation is vital, don't miss the participation party March 17<sup>th</sup>!

I see many signs of new life here. One joint project is fresh water. The water that has been kinda smelly will be transformed into drinkable water. The gift from the Grey family and the well they donated has been very useful except for drinking. Now something new is coming, it does not diminish our history but helps us move forward. We all look for signs of new life in spring.... Like the daffodils along the roadway. Spring brings new life, thanks be to God.

Let's look at your twig again. Is it a symbol of possibility or uselessness?

Think of this as a symbol for meditation as we take one more look at the parable.

**“ Ask yourself if you are like that fig tree. Are you bearing fruit or just taking up space?”**

If you are the fig tree and God is the gardener, what is the gardener offering to you?

Some of God's nurturing comes from the scriptures:

**Psalm 63** the psalmist writes: *My whole being desires you like a dry, worn, waterless land. Your constant love is better than life, My soul will feast and be filled. Your hand keeps me safe.*

### **An Invitation to Abundant Life**

Isaiah 55: 1-9

*Ho, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and you that have no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without price.*

*Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread, and your labour for that which does not satisfy? Listen carefully to me, and eat what is good, and delight yourselves in rich food.*

This is food for the soul *no calories* but full of God blessed energy, hope, patience and love.

We all need this spiritual food to grow into healthy Christians.

And if you are still not feeling very strong, hear this reassurance from Corinthians

*No testing has overtaken you that is not common to everyone. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tested beyond your strength, but with the testing he will also provide the way out so that you may be able to endure it. 1 Corinthians 10: 13*

Some of God's nurturing for you does come from your community of faith. Together this community can be a fabulous garden where saints can grow and produce other saints!

I have high hopes for this community. God provides but we need to do the gardening and growing together.

I want to offer some closing comments by Michael Curry [Feasting on The Word](#) Yr.C Vol. 2 p.95

“Jesus tells a parable about a gardener determined to tend a fruitless fig tree because he is open to the future possibility that he does not control or manage. In the end, the future is God's but we share in unfolding the future. No statement of faith says it all; no prayer fully expresses our faith; no one pastoral visit brings wholeness; no one program accomplishes the church's mission; no set of goals and objectives includes everything that needs to be done. We plant the seeds that will one day grow. We water seeds already planted, knowing they hold future promise. We may never see the end results, but that is the difference between the gardener and the worker. We are workers, not the master gardener; ministers not messiahs. And God the gardener is very patient.”