

Bring Forth and Sprout

A sermon preached by Rev. W. Dale Osborne on July 10, 2011
Lectionary Texts Used: Isaiah 55:10-13; Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23

“For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return there until they have watered the earth, making it bring forth and sprout, giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater, so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and succeed in the thing for which I sent it.”

The prophet Isaiah took full employ of nature in conveying a message about God’s relationship with the people of God’s good earth. The gifts of the heavens, the rain and the snow are wedded in a harmonious marriage to the soil of the earth. Their interplay is dynamic and fruitful. The snow and rain water the earth and encourage it to bring forth and sprout. Their dialogue accesses seed for the sower, the gardener who longs to provide bread for the hungry human. You have seen and experienced this delightful interplay if you have ever engaged your fingers in the righteous tasks of preparing the soil for seeds and the bounty that often follows their planting. The sweat of your brow and the dirt under your fingertips is a sweet price to pay for the gardener’s reward. And just what is the reward sought by the long-suffering gardener? Is it any different from the reward sought by the plant?

Friedrich Nietzsche, the 19th century German philosopher thought of the dynamic between seed, tree and fruit in this way - saying, “Everyone who enjoys supposes that the tree was concerned with the fruit, but it was really concerned with the seed. -In this lies the difference between all those who create and those who enjoy.”

The rewards of water and soil integrating with seed and sun are multiple and sometimes surprising. On some occasions, that which is brought forth and sprouts is not exactly what the gardener expected.

Case in point, my beloved wife Suzy has been working a small piece of land at our home on Tinkerbell Rd. for many months. If you count back to the time I yanked out the shrubs and the weeds and the nutrient rich soil was worked into this small plot of land, then the evolution of my wife’s lovely garden goes back almost 2 years. She has been carefully tending this small yet bountiful garden with the help of our daughters for many reasons. She loves to get dirty and be engrossed in the soil. She loves to tend the youngest sprouts as they break through the soil. She enjoys watching the plants grow up to their fuller stature. Finally, she loves to harvest and share the beautiful produce growing on the vines. Tomatoes, cucumbers and all manner of gorgeous tasty treats have sprouted forth due to her efforts at being one with God’s good Earth. But I am telling this story not for all the fruit she expected, I am telling it to point out the way God surprises us in our gardening. You see, early in June, a plant started growing in the garden for which we had planted no seed. The soil was good, the rains had come, the sun had shone brightly and a little seed with a mind of its own had begun to grow up in response to the Creator’s natural urging. This seed poured forth a large green vine with many star shaped yellow flowers. The vine spread out along the full 30 foot width of the garden. We began to have some idea of what it was based on how God had blessed our home back in late October. It was around October 31st that a robust orange pumpkin had toppled over into the dirt that would eventually become Suzy’s garden. Now, since I am not the most tidy groundskeeper, I eventually picked up most of the rotting pumpkin gourd but perhaps not all of it made its way into my trash bag. Some seeds were obviously left behind. They were barely planted and completely forgotten as the months of winter overtook our gorgeous fall. But those seeds followed their path and purpose. They entered the soil and allowed themselves to burst open so that new life could occur in the springtime.

Now the Osborne household enjoys the satisfying joy of watching a pumpkin take shape in Suzy's little field.

The prophet Isaiah's words echo in my soul when I see the strong determined pumpkin, "so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and succeed in the thing for which I sent it. For you shall go out in joy, and be led back in peace; the mountains and the hills before you shall burst into song, and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands." Hands are clapping in our home as we watch all of God's plants take shape in Suzy's surprising garden.

As I continue with my earth and sky themed sermon, I want to share a brief quote with you by the respected scientist and gardener George Washington Carver. He wrote these brief beautiful words sometime around 1900 - "Nothing is more beautiful than the loveliness of the woods before sunrise."

The woods before sunrise -- how many of you can lay claim to experiencing such timely beauty? I daresay that more than half of the youth and adults who participated in Baptist Youth Camp last month can say YES to this question. Some of them are here today. Many of them are not because it is hard for a teenager to get up early in the morning to participate in worship inside Binkley's stately brick walls. But rise up early they will if you give them a chance to walk up the well worn path to a gorgeous mountain overlook. As they slowly walk up the 40 degree angled mountain slope they observe the quiet luster of nightfall giving way to the sun's playful advances. The trees seem to open up a bit to receive the sun's warming rays. The trees of these mountain woods are more than beautiful as they protect many earth dwellers with their cool shade and home giving branches. The sun and the trees bring forth joy and sprout new life day after day on this heaven sent mountain sanctuary. I am grateful to every family and friend who allowed us the opportunity to venture up the mountain for Baptist Youth Camp. I am always pleased, along with our ever present chaperones, to witness first time campers taking in the newness and freshness of our camp experience. This year we had 10 brand new campers who had heard tales of the mysterious allure of camp. I think all of them including two who are still mastering the English language were pleasantly surprised by what God had to offer them on the mountaintop.

I like to think of all of Binkley's campers as seeds who are being exposed to very good soil during their 6 days at Laurel Ridge. The good soil, described by Jesus in his parable read today is an important component of God's interplay with humanity. The good soil yields 30, 60, even 100 fold in its harvest. The good soil the youth experience at Baptist Youth Camp is an extension of the very good soil they experience here at Binkley. Our church can and should be composed of nutrient rich soil so that seeds might bring forth a good harvest that shouts with joy to the world around it.

We who call this church our spiritual home are active participants in the tilling and planting of seeds in what we pray will be good soil. Some of you do this tilling and planting quite literally. There are scores of you who tend the soil and gardens on our property. For all your labors we are grateful. Specifically though I want to name out loud, Patty Michaels, Bob Seymour and Karen Elder who have shaped the lovely garden just outside our sanctuary doors for so many years. Their physical yield has been great but their spiritual yield may be even greater. You see, the plants they have grown and tended provide rest, hope, joy and memory filled contentment for the people who stroll through or sit on our church property. Some come to sit and remember their loved ones whose ashes are buried or scattered in and around our memorial garden. All come to know God's spiritual blessings in a fresh way as their five senses take in the beauty of sprouting joy. Bring forth and sprout brothers and sisters for God is planting something beautiful in each of you.