

According to Mark . . . April 2017

I'm starting my garden early this year. I know, the Old Farmer's Almanac, my mother and grandmother and the Windham Garden Club and every other wise woman I know tell me that it's only really safe to plant after Memorial Day (well, in recent years MAYBE Mother's Day). But I'm going to try something new and different because this winter has been just a little too cold, just a little too snowy, and I need a change. A new start. And what better way to feel like getting a new start in the waning days of late April than to go out in the garden?

Now I'm not going to remind you that 2,000 years ago there were also competing Gardens.

One of them was the place where Jesus sought peace, reflection, respite, and perhaps deliverance from what was about to befall him the next day (the Garden of Gethsemane). He spent time with those whom he loved, he prayed to God and asked his friends to stay up with him while he faced his fears and fate. And he was arrested for being the modern day equivalent of a political prisoner, a rabble-rouser whom the thousands had welcomed into Jerusalem just a few days earlier, and those in charge wanted to ensure that he was silenced once and for all (that scenario could happen in today's day and age as well in some countries). This garden of betrayal, on the Mount of Olives, came to represent the place where God and the disciples would spend the last moments of peace together. If you go there today, there are massive olive trees 10 feet across at the trunk at the monastery said to date from the time of Emperor Constantine, some 1,700 years old, and it is repurposed as a garden of remembrance, of reconciliation, and of hope, for it is the olive branch that reminds us that the flood is over, land is in sight (the dove brought an olive branch back to Noah after being released), and the Ark can safely land and begin establishing God's life and reign again.

In the other Garden was a tomb. A place that took the body of the human Jesus, and kept it for three days, and when those without hope and overwhelmed with grief came to attend to Jesus' body and look for him, he was gone. In their time of helplessness, hopelessness, and despair, they found not just peaceful moments, but everlasting joy and everlasting life. They knew from the moment they went on that Easter morning from the empty tomb that their lives would never be the same, that they would know that God was here and with them for a time, and that they needed to tell everyone what happened.

Now I'm not going to point out that in the first garden were men who were confused and wondering what was going on and they ended up hiding from God; denying they knew him. In the second garden the women knew just what to do, they went running to tell the others and that God had never abandoned them at all, but that God is risen and death cannot win the hearts of those who believe.

So I'm back to my quandary of when to plant. I'm a guy: I want to have some moments of peace before the frosts come a little early and betray my careless planning and prove to me that I cannot hide from mother nature, but I'm going to plant anyway. The women in my life tell me otherwise: be patient, wait

a few days, and a beautiful bounty will grace your 20 x 20 space all summer long, and new life will spring forth in unimagined abundance.

So do I listen to my stubborn, overcontrolling ego or the women I have come to love? What do you think? In which garden will you stand, sit, pray, witness, or just dig in the dirt for renewal? God asks us each day - not to know the answer, but to stay faithful on the journey, whatever our choices, for the garden will indeed bear fruit and abundance. But the choice is ours on how we get there.

Happy Easter.

Pastor Mark