

According to Mark . . . November 2019

November's fall colors at our house were a little bit short this year due to a couple of strong storms. The good news is that I was able to get my leaves raked a little early. But it made it feel like winter was coming a little sooner than hoped, despite the warm temperatures and the late frost that gave a few more days of growing tomatoes, peppers, and cucumbers. And I'm grateful for another season of garden bounty and God's graces to the succulents, even if it was a record year for squash bugs.

And so November makes me reflect on what I'm going to do with my time. Digging in the dirt is a favorite pastime, because soil is the basis for all life. After all, plants can't grow without it, and if plants don't grow, then the animals go hungry in a hurry. The Bible is full of agricultural analogies, parables, and allegories for a reason - that these images have a resonance to our souls even if most humans are apartment and city dwellers these days. We long for a connection to our natural world; it's why trees are planted not just in parks but along the most busy city streets. So what's a nascent gardener to do after the first frost? (Ok, besides vacation in a sunnier locale. Stick with me.)

We can feel a little bit lost when we lose access to things and people we love. Change comes in our lives from many directions, and it doesn't always follow the gentle rhythms of the seasons. Loved ones, jobs, friends are all doing their own thing and it doesn't always jive with our thing or what we want. Just like an untimely windstorm, we can feel on edge, uneasy, disrupted when things don't go our way and we see someone move on, or fall ill, or become removed from our daily lives in one manner or another. The soil of our lives which seemed so fertile and planted seems to have changed from something life-giving to something entirely different. And the problem with life's changes, just like the seasons, is that there is no going backward to that time when we felt all was right with the world. Or as my Grandma so famously said to me, "you can't go home again".

So what do we do with the shifting, unsure soil in which we now stand and are planted? What do we do when we can no longer count on the soil bearing fruits as it once did? When life begins to change in ways we don't understand, how do we respond?

The truth is that the Bible teaches us the best lessons in these circumstances. When the stump is cut off, somehow a new shoot comes out and up. When we feel we are out of food for our spirits and souls, somehow we are given enough for today. As we begin to worry about things that haven't even happened, we are reminded that we are given sufficient for what we need, and in that, we can find that we have more than enough loaves and fishes to share with one another so that all are fed.

The Bible is paradoxical like that, isn't it? There is strength in weakness. The first shall be last. Blessed are those who mourn, who are poor in spirit, the meek, for it is they who inherit the earth. Why? Because when we are thankful just for today and being upright and breathing, that we seek God's grace (which is right there, each morning for our hearts to have) before our own wants and glories then all those changes in the world and expectations we have seem a little easier to bear. We finally understand

that we don't stand in bad soil. We just stand differently, but with even more life-giving force than we knew was possible.

Even if the leaves blow away early. Or the frost comes. Or the squash gets eaten against all our efforts.

We can still have a good day, even when staring at frozen ground. Because Spring does come, and with it, another chance to grow a blessed (although different) bounty.

Pastor Mark