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'The LORD God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it.' Genesis 2:15 NIV June 26th 2016

Today we are talking about all things horticultural, as a prelude to our July series on the Flowers of the Bible. We are back to nature with a vengeance, and what better place to start than the Garden of Eden, where it all began.

The LORD God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it.' Genesis 2:15

God's original intention was that man was to be a gardener. To live on, and off of the produce of his land. When we look around today, it's hard to imagine... with our high rises, subways, processed food, and life in the fast lane. A marked contrast to life in the countryside. And yet, way back in the eighteenth century, given a choice between living in a village, and living in a town, people voted with their feet...and the rural population became the urban population. A far cry from the Garden of Eden.

Here in upstate New York, where farming was a way of life, sadly, the majority of farms that existed and thrived, just 50 or so years ago, have ceased to exist. We have lost a way of life, and more importantly, we have lost our inherent link with nature.

We are so far away from the Garden of Eden, that when we read in the Old Testament about the simple life, as shepherds of flocks, or laborers in fields, we find it so hard to relate. What has that to do with us?

Well, it has everything to do with us, because nature still has the capacity to calm. Nature has means to lift our lives from the mundane to the profound.

The ability to connect or re-connect us with our Creator, and above all the means by which we can handle the stresses and strains of life, and put them in perspective.

Horticulture. The art or science of garden cultivation. From the Latin for garden 'hortus' and culture, growing. Which gives us 'garden growing.'

Where does the story of Creation begin for mankind? In a garden Where did Jesus spend his last minutes as a free man? In a garden. Where was Jesus first seen as the resurrected Christ? In a garden.

Gardens can be big or small, but they each have the capacity to **transport us into an alternate reality.** A comforting, therapeutic reality, where chores, dangers,

complications fade into the background, and the flowers, bushes, bees and insects become our allies.

Thus it was at the beginning of time. God made man not the owner of the lands he was to work, but the steward. Dedicated to sustaining and encouraging new growth for the real Owner. God himself. Which is why at offertory I say 'All things come from you, and of your own do we give you.' All we give to God, was God's to begin with!

Now if you already are a committed gardener, you know the pleasures involved... getting your hands dirty, eating food you have made yourself, or looking at flowers you grew from seed. There is something intensely satisfying about saying 'I did this!'

There are of course other times when the best of plans don't quite work out. When the moles invade your front lawn. When the aphids eat your orchids. When the torrential spring rains flatten your beds. Gardening is not for the faint of heart.

Life is a little like that. It reminds me of the saying. 'Some days you're the bug, some days you're the windshield.'

Our walk of faith is rather like that. Faith is not a steady diet of sunshine, with a perfect temperature of 84 degrees Fahrenheit. Faith involves drought, and endurance. It involves connectivity with God. Lose that connection, and like the Gospel reading told us today, the vine branches will wither and die.

There are occasional flashes of bright light, like the sun breaking through on a cloudy day; illuminating, uplifting, and making us smile.

Ever thought how great it would be to be able to bottle up sunshine, and open the bottle and spill some sunshine out on the dark days?

Solar power is the nearest we have come... what if you could open up something and immediately feel intense happiness. And no, I am not talking about chocolate, or your tax refund.

When you are a gardener, you are growing things from the bottom up. You don't start with a flower, you start with a seed. It grows roots. Without a root, nothing can take hold, nothing can resist the winds and rain. Nothing can flourish without being rooted. No vegetable, no flower. No human being.

Christianity is a ground roots organization. It started from the bottom up, in response to a man the like of which the world had never seen before.

Jesus used lots of gardening analogies.

The sower and his seed. Contrasting the different results when seed is sown in good soil, and in bad. He talked about weeds, and that at some point these weeds need to be uprooted, and thrown away. He's telling you this is serious stuff. Don't be a weed! It doesn't end well!

Jesus talked about the mustard seed, how from the smallest of seeds it became the biggest of plants, so big that birds could perch in its branches.

You need roots.

You need to think big!

Remember. Don't be a weed. It doesn't end well!

He talked about the stages of growing that all living plants go through

Mark 4:26 This is what the kingdom of God is like. A man scatters seed on the ground. Night and day, whether he sleeps or gets up, the seed sprouts and grows, though he does not know how. All by itself the soil produces grain- first the stalk, then the head, then the full kernel in the head. As soon as the grain is ripe, he puts the sickle to it, because the harvest has come.

We all need to grow up. Towards the sky. Think big. Grow roots. Stand tall. And yes, don't be a weed. It doesn't end well!

Just as in John 15 verses 1-2 we heard this morning ' I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful.

And later verses 5-6 'I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit, apart from me you can do nothing. If anyone does not remain in me, he is like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned. That's those darned weeds. I told you! It didn't end well!

If you want good CROPS you need:

Connectivity.

Roots.

H2O Watering, on a regular basis. (wascally wabbit from Winnie the Pooh)

Pruning and patience.

And finally you need the right SOIL.

Just as you need to plant the right plants in the right soil, with the right amount of shade. Ever heard that phrase 'bloom where you're planted?' that's talking about us.

We have all been planted here in Milford at this moment in time, for a reason. Whether you see yourself as a daisy, a rose, an invasive loosestrife or a dandelion, we all have the potential to grow. Here, In this community. We are here for a reason.

Yes, we may well need pruning. Maybe there's something we are up to, that is not going to end well. An opportunity that fails to materialize maybe. Congratulations!

You've just been pruned!

Did I mention patience? Waiting for the seeds to take root and start to grow. Or in my case, waiting in vain for the seeds to take root and start to grow.

The one and only time I planted some vegetables in the garden, I prepared the soil diligently, I sowed the seed at the exact depth and at the exact distance it suggested, and was well pleased with myself..... and then I read on the seed packet to make sure that the soil was compacted. So I walked backwards and forwards for some considerable amount of time, until I was convinced that the ground was compact. Needless to say, not a single seed survived the experience, and boy oh boy do I need help when it comes to gardening. OK I need help with gardening, and with life.

Discipleship is like becoming an apprentice gardener. In the Gospels, Jesus is teaching his disciples, and us, what works, and what doesn't.

If you're connected with Jesus you will never wither and die. If you apply Jesus' teachings to your life, then you are going to grow roots, strength, and you are going to grow. Taller. We are called to pass on what we learn to others. To sow the seeds of hope ourselves. In doing so we spread the good news that there is more to life than high rises, subways, processed food, and life in the fast lane. There is real life!

I chuckle at the so called reality shows on TV. That's not reality. That's people acting up because they are on TV. **You want reality, take a walk in your garden.**

Pull up a few weeds.

Sit and look at the robin walking around waiting for a tasty worm to pop up.

We may no longer live in the Garden of Eden, but we are called to be organic...

connected to the good things in life, without influence of our cultures pesticides such as pornography, addictions or distractions.

My grandfather in England used to spend a lot of his time in the garden. One reason was he liked peace and quiet. And grandma did like to talk a lot.

But mainly he spent a lot of time in his garden because he loved growing vegetables. Green beans in particular. It was a place of solitude, and peace.

Do you have a place of solitude and peace to spend time in? Do you spend time in it regularly?

That's my challenge for you this week... and the challenge for me too. **Solitude. Peace. Find some!**

Gardeners Prayer:

O Lord,

Grant that in some way it may rain every day, say from about midnight until three o'clock in the morning, but, you see, it must be gentle and warm so that it can soak in; grant that at the same time it would not rain on campion, alyssum, helianthemum, lavender, and the others which you in your infinite wisdom know are drought loving plants - I will write their names on a paper if you like - and grant that the sun may shine

the whole day long, but not everywhere (not for instance, on spiraea, or on gentian, plantain lily, and rhododendron), and not too much; that there may be plenty of dew and little wind, enough worms, no plant-lice and snails, no mildew, and that once a week thin liquid manure and guano may fall from heaven.

This is the Master Gardener's Prayer:

God, you have created a beautiful world for us to live in. Help us to see You in nature, and to take the time to enjoy being in Your presence. Each and every day. Water us with your compassion. Nourish us with Your word.
In Your Son's precious name we pray.

Amen.