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Matthew 13:1-9,18-23

Isaiah 55:10-13

Psalms 65:9-13

Romans 8:1-11

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The Sixth Sunday after Pentecost

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My husband, Dwayne, is a very impatient gardener. In the spring he starts to watch the plants in our garden...he watches for the first shoots of the season. And as warm weather drifts in each spring his impatience tends to grow. A week passes...no sign of sprouts. Two weeks pass...he starts to get worried. Three weeks pass...he begins to consider that nothing is going to happen. Four weeks pass...he is certain something is wrong. With each passing week, Dwayne's impatience grows to a conviction...maybe all of our work isn't going to pay off, maybe the seeds were bad, maybe there's been too much rain, maybe it's been too cold.

I laugh every year when that first hint of green finally breaks through the ground. It's as though all of our hopes and dreams say yes to another year of growth and beauty. Really, when those little shoots start to emerge I think we both breathe a sigh of relief.

But we have also had our share of disappointments in the garden. For the past four years we have worked to reclaim that little patch of earth behind the church. We have repaired the raised beds, pulled up more weeds than we can count, planted seeds and watered the ground. But each year, it seemed only a portion of our plants actually grew. There were a couple of beds that refused to produce anything at all and the weeds were unbearable. Dwayne's impatience started to rub off on me and I started counting down the days until fall when I could just pull it all up and walk away for a few months.

It seemed that no matter how hard we worked, we just couldn't get it right. Impatience turned to discouragement. Discouragement turned to doubt. Doubt turned to ambivalence. And the garden would ultimately become a burden year after year. The reality set in that we just didn't have the skills we needed...at least not on our own. And then, this year, two of our parishioners offered to help.

Let me tell you...Lyn and Bernie are miracle workers with soil. You see, for years, Dwayne and I kept planting but the soil wasn't healthy. So no matter how much we planted and watered and weeded, the soil wasn't rich enough to grow big, strong, healthy plants.

So, Lyn and Bernie started with the basics...a perfect ratio of garden soil and peat moss and fertilizer worked carefully into the beds. In hindsight, it seemed so simple...how had we not worked with the soil before? We had jumped ahead in our impatience but hadn't created the right foundation.

Now the garden looks like something out of a jungle. The plants are overflowing to the point that it's hard to walk down the aisles between the raised beds. The flowers are so heavy with

blooms that many have bent under their own weight. The bees are thrilled with the pollen and butterflies are everywhere. It's magical.

All it took was some much needed guidance from others, a good foundation, and a dose of patience.

And so the parable from our Gospel reading this week carries with it a special beauty especially for those of us who love to spend hours outdoors and in our gardens. But, when I look beyond the beauty of the harvest in this text, I can't help but remember all of struggles we have had in our little garden.

It makes me question something bigger that I think this parable is getting at. Maybe our text in Matthew isn't so much a celebration of the good harvest but a warning, a cautionary tale on how easily our rush to get what we want results in unhealthy patterns and choices that take us away from God and from one another.

In other words, it asks us to consider how our impatience is pushing us towards ambivalence...when we are desperate for change...in our lives and in our communities. When we have worked so hard to repair a relationship or end an addiction or heal a sickness. When we watch the news and see violence and hate all around us. When things are so overwhelming that we start to wonder if all of the effort we have put forth is even worth it.

And so our impatience turns to discouragement and discouragement to doubt and doubt feeds ambivalence. And we end up pulling up all of the things we have tried to grow and just walk away. We say to ourselves, I can't make a difference or my voice doesn't matter or I'm tired or I'm scared or I don't have the skills to do what needs to be done.

This is where our text gets interesting. Matthew actually gives us affirming guidance when it comes to our tendencies toward impatience. However, the guidance that we need to hear was left out of our lectionary selection. So, I want us to do a little extra reading in Matthew chapter 13 in order to dig deeper into the larger lesson. If you look closely you will notice that our reading skips over verses 10 – 17 which begin right after the words, "Let anyone with ears listen."

Now, when Jesus says these words, he has just finished the first part of the Parable of the Sower and his disciples ask him why he teaches in parables. When he answers them, Jesus quotes from Isaiah,

*"You will indeed listen, but never understand,  
and you will indeed look, but never perceive.  
For this people's heart has grown dull,  
and their ears are hard of hearing,  
and they have shut their eyes;  
so that they might not look with their eyes,*

*and listen with their ears,  
and understand with their heart and turn—  
and I would heal them.”*

And then Jesus goes on to tell his disciples...

*“But blessed are your eyes, for they see, and your ears, for they hear. Truly I tell you, many prophets and righteous people longed to see what you see, but did not see it, and to hear what you hear, but did not hear it.”*

Jesus is telling the disciples that not everyone is going to get it right. Not everyone is going to understand. In essence, they will be impatient. They will get discouraged. They will doubt. They will become ambivalent because their hearts have become dull and tired.

I think it's important that we include these verses in our reading because for me, they affirm for us that we will struggle to get the foundation right and we will need help at times. Luckily, like the disciples, there are people in our lives who can help us cultivate our hearts and encourage us when we struggle. The blessing of a community is that we can lean on one another when we become impatient and discouraged, when we doubt or when we want to give up.

Jesus understood this.

Because there will be times when our work doesn't take root right away, when our endurance runs thin, when trouble pulls us away from what God is calling us to do, when the cares of the world choke out the yield we had once dreamed of.

In those times, we are called to work together, to break up the hardness of the human heart, to heal the wounds that have cut too deep, to reassure one another of the importance of hope and faith for a good harvest.

Jesus understood that we will all get impatient. He understood that the change that is needed in our hearts and in our world takes time but when we get the help we need, when we place our hope in God and in one another, we are able to cultivate the healthy foundation that can begin to grow something beautiful. So be patient. Have faith in yourself and in one another.

Thanks be to God. Amen.