

Pastor's Letter

Growing out in my backyard is a zucchini plant the size of a VW. But it was not always thus. Back in May, when I stuck a scraggly stem into the ground, I never would have dreamed of the behemoth that now reigns there. The hot, wet summer has blessed my spherical friend, as it pushes out "lawn carp" in every direction. It has also pushed me...to find creative ways to cook zucchini. So far, I'm in a bit of an "oil and garlic" rut – but it's a delicious rut.

I find that the zucchini plant does more than feed my tummy; it feeds my soul, as well – if I let it. Such deep abundance from something once held as "no account" is a message of hope for me. And I guess I need that message...

I admit it: I'm prone to predict, assess, and rank pretty much everything in the world around me - animal, vegetable or mineral. That's a "good" zucchini plant. That's a "bad" idea. That's a "good" person. That's a "bad" group of people. I sometimes feel as though inside me dwells a miniature Caesar, lifting his hand to the crowd in the Coliseum, poised to render either a "thumbs up" or a "thumbs down", at the least provocation.

In my defense, our culture is rife with "thumbs up" and "thumbs down": the "10 best cities in America", The "5 worst storms in U.S. history", the "20 best schools", the "10 worst films", the "top 10 athletes", and the "20 worst dresses on the runway at the Oscars."

We live in a statistician's dream world – always something to rank, rate and label. I'm just glad my zucchini never heard my doubt-filled muttering a couple of months ago. I fear it might have broken its spirit...and impoverished my diet!

I've come to believe that most of us ardently wish to be seen as good and competent and beloved, regardless of our scraggly beginnings or our missteps along the way. We want to be viewed through the eyeballs of Christ - the one who could peer past first (and second !) appearances and see the glowing ember of God within each human heart.

But Jesus didn't just "happen" to have that gift. I believe he had it because he had first felt God's deep and searching love himself. "We can't give what we ain't got." It's impossible to love another if we hate ourselves. It's like standing at the base of a mountain trying to offer assistance to another climber half way up. On the other hand, it's almost automatic to love another if we truly love ourself.

As the summer flows into early autumn, I hope to join with others as, together, we learn to love both ourselves and others more deeply. Small groups meeting to nurture the spirit, prayer groups to cultivate our bond with God, and worship to kindle both faith and service, are all on the horizon.

My zucchini plant stands in silent, lush testimony to God's cultivating hand in our midst – even when we might never have believed it. May we pay attention to even "no account" beginnings, trusting in the glory of God to blow away our tiny predictions and bring moist, rich life to even the driest souls – in and through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Peace be with you all...

Tim