

Pastor's Letter – June, 2016

I'm starting a new garden this year. By that, I don't mean that I'm planting new plants in my **OLD** garden. I mean that I'm starting a garden where there hadn't been one: in the middle of a lawn, "from scratch." In fact, it entails a whole **LOT** of scratching!

I'm quickly realizing that it's one thing to dream of adding another vegetable garden; it's another thing to actually do it. Well-established lawns don't yield easily to one man's gardening dream. Grass is stubborn. It becomes quite comfortable being grass, and being where it is, and it resists efforts to remove it. I can feel that resistance...in my back and arms. Next time someone waxes poetic about the loveliness of lawns, I'll remind them that grass has a will of iron!

I've been dreaming about a new vegetable garden for some time. Dreams are easy. They are so easy that we can do them while lying in bed, and we routinely do! But to put that dream into action, requires a lot of ground-work. Actually, it's slightly below ground-work: digging down to do the necessary work of preparation.

The spiritual life is not so different. It's often necessary to dig, sometimes fairly deep. Stuff needs to be turned over, exposed to the light of day. There's a fair amount of sifting and sorting and even discarding, all in the service of preparing for growth.

And then there's the issue of making space for all this new growth. My brother-in-law's truck was once parked where my new garden is going in. No more. Tomatoes don't grow very well beneath a Dodge Ram. It's been scientifically proven over at Cornell. So, there's been a need to make some changes in land use.

New growth is a challenge that faces every individual, every church and every community. Every time a new person joins a family or a committee, every time a new family comes to town, every time a new idea is proposed, there's inevitable shifting and jostling and adjusting. And like my beloved grass, there can be considerable resistance at first.

We country folk don't have the daily lesson in change that is "enjoyed" by subway riders in big cities: the train pulls up at the subway stop, the doors open, and 50 more people crowd in. Almost at an unconscious level, people slide over to accommodate this new surge of humanity. "And the train keeps a 'rollin' all day long."

I wouldn't have bothered with all this change if I hadn't wanted to eat cheap and eat local. (Not much more local than the backyard!) So, in my mind, all this work is worth it. Really good dreams are like that: they are so compelling that they drag us into hard work and weird change in spite of our resistance.

I believe that's typical of the Holy Spirit. It's a conspiracy of God: the Spirit plants the seed of a beautiful dream in our minds, and then drags us into all sorts of strange, messy, and sometimes painful efforts to realize it. Sort of a set-up, really. But a blessed one. I guess it's how we grow...and how the Kingdom of God expands.

I have a lot more to do in my slowly expanding garden. At first, it looked like a skinny drainage ditch. It has now grown to 15 feet long and over a foot wide and resembles a python grave. But I have hope. I'll continue to chip away and gain more space for growth. The grass will continue to resist. I guess it's the nature of grass. And, through the grace of God, and through the grass and sod, I'll persevere. I wish you beautiful dreams and the strength to pursue them.

In faith,
Tim