

Easter V Year B 2015

About five or six years ago, as if our garden in the back yard were not enough, Katharine dug up half of our front yard and planted what she intended to be a vegetable garden.... Right there in the front yard... all the grass dug up, and the freshly dug quadrilateral par tiered with eggplant and tomatoes and squash and peppers in the quadrants... Stepping stones were placed so as to walk among the plants... and everything was mulched after the soil was turned over, worked, and enriched. It made me tired just watching Katharine doing the work.... I was there pretty much for moral support.... We had high hopes for this garden.... Great expectations... that's true of all who garden... They all have high hopes... else they wouldn't plant the garden in the first place, right?

Well these five or six years later the garden is still there... Katharine has stuck to the gardening, as I continue to encourage her... and it is not at all what we expected it to be... the tomatoes didn't do so well... too much phosphorous we think, and those stink bugs with the probosci... and the squash borers did in the squash... so Katharine changed strategies (with my encouragement) and planted other things... Now we have drift roses, and Echinacea, and cilantro that has re-seeded everywhere, and oregano and sage... and some garlic... we think... and marigolds... It wasn't planned that way. It's just the way it turned out... so much like life... The one thing that has remained ... is the persistence of the weeds, and the occasional feral cat of the neighborhood.... And hope... high hopes for this garden.

Legend has it that when asked what he would do if he knew that the end of the world was at hand, St. Francis of Assisi answered that he would keep hoeing his garden... And of course the end is at hand... the old is always passing away, making way for the new. The garden of course, is a consummate symbol of what life is all about.... A garden takes hard work, and preparation, and persistence, and awareness... It is constantly beset by trouble and ill fortune.... It disappoints; it amazes... It falls short, and it exceeds expectations.... It never grows like we planned, or like we thought it would.... The tending of it can be mundane, just as it can be exhilarating.... Death and life, the rhythm of the garden... And there are moments of stillness in the garden at dusk when all is right and true and beautiful... gardeners know this.... I don't believe God has a clue as to how the garden will turn out... God only knows that it is good.

The metaphor makers of the gospel of John are on to this as well... "I am the vine, my father is the vine grower... and you are the branches".... Jesus is

speaking of a reality far removed from the ethos of modern western Christianity... Modern western Christianity in the main espouses a God far removed from us in the heavens... the chief God of the pantheon... the unmoved mover of the Greeks... A God who judges from on high our fallenness, our shortcomings... our sin... We say we are redeemed by the crucified and risen Christ, but we don't really believe that... our self-loathing manifest in our scapegoating and violence evidence to the contrary... Perhaps it is convenient for God to be removed from us, lest we have to deal with God face to face... perhaps our obsessive attachment to our so-called sin is in truth a buffer, a manufactured illusion between us and the God who Jesus proclaims as pure love... perhaps our insisting on the fallenness of humankind is nothing more than an abdication of our godlikeness, an abdication of our responsibility to be about the business of salvation... salvation meaning justice and dignity and equality and well-being... Now many if not most of us in the Episcopal Church and more particularly here at All Saints would say that we are over that kind of Christianity... but it is still in the air, and it has great influence... it's in the fabric of our culture, and I would daresay that it has more influence on us than we think.

But Jesus here in John's gospel is speaking of a spirituality far different... Jesus speaks of a God who lives not in the heavens but in earth... a God who is a process... not an end but process... gardener, vine, branches... the garden a symbol of process... a collaborative process of bearing fruit... and the fruit is the well-being and dignity of all people... The object of our lives is not living for God or Jesus, but for the garden, that for which God and Jesus live....It is for the garden that we are here on earth. We are born for the process of bearing the fruits of love to our world...

Let's clear something up...We don't live in a fallen world... we live in a garden, mysterious and beautiful, and its bounty is meant for all... and just as in any garden its life is beset by the weeds... weeds like injustice and violence and corruption and self-interest, and the blight of envy... but we persist, and in our persistence we become the vines, the branches, because we are contingent stewards of the garden which when all is said and done is beautiful and good... the garden, the created order, is in truth an intimate collaboration of serving the greater good, a good which we can't know... It will always be germinating in hope... I think God Godself is in utter awe of the garden in its becoming.... God is after all a gardener, like us.... And like all gardens... this garden in which we live and move is full of hope and expectation... worth the work and sweat and

inspiration, and disappointments.... We are told by the writer that we are to abide in this... persist.... Because the garden is the only thing.... Still becoming, growing, propagating the good and the true.

Trust the metaphor brothers and sisters... trust the life cycle of the garden... the rhythm of the seasons... the rhythm of death and life... death and life... because within our work germinates the true and the good... Trust that the seeds of justice and kindness and good-will will bear fruit in good time... and there will be a stillness at dusk when it is time to rest... a stillness in which all is right and true and beautiful... We know this because we are gardeners... gardeners with high hopes... because the garden is the only thing.