

June 13, 2021

Big things happen little by little, they are miracles, in our lives and in our communities, and we are richly blessed.

Today, we have a couple parables using some gardening imagery... I love parables, they are a window into seeing God... I love how the Holy Spirit directs our interpretations...

Today I'd like to share a story about my garden, that is also a healing story.

About nine years ago, it was spring and I had planted my garden like usual... The typical things for me, lots of tomatoes, peppers, beans... And exactly like right now, everything was sprouted and really growing....

And then, out of no-where, I woke up in the middle of the night in a ton of chest pain. It seemed to go away when I sat up, but every time I laid down it came right back... The next morning, I knew something was wrong... At a meeting with some pastoral colleagues, they convinced me to go see a doctor. So, I went...

Well, as it turned out I had a pulmonary embolism! I had blood clots in my lungs.... And suddenly I was in the hospital, learning to give myself Lovanox shots, seeing hematologists and taking coumadin, or rat poison or blood thinners.

Now, many years before the embolism, at the entrance to the garden, I had built an arbor using old logs from dead trees in the woods. I planted a grape vine at each of the four corners, and over time I had trained the vines to grow up and onto a trellis. I made the arbor, I liked it, it was unique. The birds liked it too!

Two days after the blood clot, it was raining and raining, the garden was saturated, the soil was soft, the grape vines were in full leaf acting like a big sail, the wind blew and the arbor toppled over into a big heap of logs and twisted vines... I was a depressed. The whole tangled mess seemed to be a metaphor for my health.

And because it happened during a time when I was most painful, it seemed to taunt me because I couldn't do anything about it. I had blood clots in my lung, and everything seemed to be falling apart. My health, my arbor, my garden... It was a complete mess, it was a dark time...

Now, within a couple days of the embolism being diagnosed, I received a few cards and letters wishing me well, and then within a few more days I literally had a tsunami of cards and letters, tons of them. You can't imagine how it feels to be on the receiving end of so much love and attention.

Every card and letter, was like a "laying on of hands," and I laughed and cried and cherished **each and every single one** of them. Little by little, my health was being restored...

Several months after the pulmonary embolism, in the fall, I was finally feeling stronger, I stood at that toppled arbor, and resolved to clean it up little by little. So, I bent over and pulled a few weeds. Then I had a better view at all the vines and brush. It was way beyond saving; I could only cut it all down and start over.

So, I started slowly in one corner. I cut the vines, I tugged and yanked on that brush. It was all twisted together like a giant bird's nest. Finally, I was able to cut some of the bigger logs loose and haul them away. Then I started worked on the vines, and little by little, eventually through the course of that afternoon I cleared the entire pile!

Oh, it felt so good to look at the garden and not see that mess. And you know-- I patted myself on the back because I had pretty much finished the whole project myself.

And the meaning of that slowly dawned on me; I had finished the project by myself; I had regained enough strength to do it! The embolism and the chaos around it finally seemed cleared and I decided for myself that I was whole again, and healed.

This healing was a progression that took time and attention-- nurturing...

The parable that Jesus gives us, seems to suggest that the Kingdom of God is like a process, that comes little by little... ***And it's not the speed of that process that matters, as much as it's about the fruit that is yielded.*** It's all about the harvest!

And it comes through faith... it's not something that is ours to possess like a prize or reward. Faith is the vehicle God uses within us; and within others... It is a mixture of imagination, energy, courage, trust, belief, and hope.

Faith is what produces the fruit... Faith moves people to send cards and letters... Faith draws us out of ourselves; and imagines how to love our neighbor. Faith comes from God; and it is God who orchestrates faith within each of us to bring forth the fruit of His Kingdom.

I'm always amazed at how our churches get things done! There are so many people who roll up their sleeves and work together for the common good of all. Whether it's plowing snow, working in the cemetery, being on the council, organizing bible studies, pulling weeds, being involved with missions, or music, or VBS, or Sunday school, or even playing softball... so many examples...

And we don't do it to get a big reward... You see the Kingdom of God is like that; it's about belonging, love, participation and connection. Kingdom work is faith in action. It does what it does. It is the fruit of that loving process...

This is a simple truth. The kingdom of God is like a garden... big things happen little by little... they are miracles! And indeed, we are all richly blessed. Amen.