

Grace, mercy, & peace from God our father & our Lord Jesus Christ.

There are four beautiful red tomatoes sitting in my kitchen window sill, six yellow and a large acorn squash gracing my produce bowl, a refrigerator filled with cucumber salad, and bags of fresh kale and lettuce, and all from what was once an overgrown blackberry bramble. God's creative potential was hidden in that mess we called the back lot.

But thanks to the seemingly tireless efforts of Michael Luberts and the Community Garden Committee, what was once an unsightly, overgrown blackberry bramble filled with rusted junk has become a fertile place where food grows in abundance. We've seen the building of raised beds, Sam Wright Osborn's compost bin, a beautiful sign painted by Kristen Nieto, the addition of a storage shed, and Kory Nieto's fence improvements enclosing the garden, and contributions by so many others. If you haven't had the chance to take a walk down in the community garden this summer, you should. It's a quiet, gentle, abundant, and peaceful place to pass a few minutes. Things only seem get better and better.

But before that over grown lot could take on new life as a place for local families to grow their gardens, before it, ***a fair amount of killing had to be done.*** What was there before – blackberry vines and knot weed – did not want to give up their hold on that piece of ground. It took a dedicated, disciplined group of guys to get rid of all the blackberries, and a determined crew – Michael Luberts, Tim

Tengesdal, Glen Reudiger, and – to outlast the knotweed, which seemed to come back no matter how many times they pulled it out, dug it out, sprayed it, etc. It had to be killed with patience and determination before that patch of ground could begin a new and fruitful life as verdant community garden.

Just as the Garden Committee recognized that the stubborn invasive species of weeds had to be destroyed before the new life of the garden could take hold, Paul sees that there are sinful habits and ways that must be rooted up in our lives in order for the new life to take root and flourish. Paul encourages the Colossians to:

“Put to death, therefore, whatever in you is earthly: fornication, impurity, passion, evil desire, and greed (which is idolatry)”

This is the patch we’ve inherited as children of a fallen humanity. Selfishness rules us, and the selfishness of the world more deeply establishes the selfishness within us. It is an ever deepening mire of critique and sorrow and pain that makes us wall ourselves off from our neighbor, even the one’s sleeping in our own houses. It breeds hatefulness, judgment, resentment, hopelessness. It leaves 20 people dead in an El Paso Walmart in 29 seconds, and 26 injured and 9 dead on the streets of Dayton, Ohio; in case you want to delude yourself that everything is still okay, this was the 250th mass shooting in America. We think this is not our problem, but it is all of our fault. We’ve stopped seeing each other, stopped caring for who we cannot see any longer, and the pain like an abscess cannot be contained, but bursts out in a hundred hurtful, painful, deadly ways.

God does not want this for us. This is why Christ came and taught and healed and died and was raised to open for us a new life, even in this world of brokenness. We are consigned to this broken world, but we do not have to be ruled by it. The author of Colossians reminds us that:

“you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. ² Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth, ³ for you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God” (Col. 3:1-3).

There is a new life hidden in Christ for every baptized child of God. Note that **Paul does not say** “*there is a new life hidden in you.*” But, “*Your new life is **hidden with Christ in God.***” So work needs to happen on two fronts. We need to put to death what is earthly – what selfishness brings to light – so that the new life God has established in Christ can take root in us. And taking root and nourished produce and abundance of good fruit: **love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness.**

This new life does not promise an end to all suffering, as Paul clearly notes in his words to the Colossian congregation, but it unites us in Christ’s suffering for the world. By beginning to “*put to death*” what plagues humanity and resides in us, we can at least begin to mitigate, neutralize, and defuse our part in the evil that plagues the world. And at the same time, find and live our new life hidden in Christ with God.

But this new life cannot take root within us unless a fair amount of killing is done. Dedication and determination are required to pull out, dug it, and keep at bay the earthly life that wants to turn our lives into an overgrown, thorny bramble filled with malignant weeds.

Above all never forget that the solution, the remedy, the fix does not reside in us, but is hidden with Christ in God. Seek your new life hidden with Christ in God. *In time it will produce a harvest of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness.*

AMEN !!!