

For most of my adult life, I have tried to keep a garden. Sometimes it is large enough to grow all kinds of foods like tomatoes, broccoli, corn, potatoes, herbs, and carrots. Sometimes its just been a couple of pots of cherry tomatoes hanging off the balcony to my first floor apartment. Right now, its a couple of three feet wide half barrels on my back porch filled with mostly dead plants - which is to be expected given that its February. I went out there yesterday and tried to pull a couple of weeds and discovered that the dirt in the barrels is still frozen. So while my hands are starting to itch with a desire to plants seeds and trim rose bushes, we are still months and months away from the Ice Saints - the three saint days in the middle of May that Central European folk tradition tells us will be the last gasp of plant killing frost in these parts. I'll just have to keep eyeing the seed catalogues and keep waiting.

I like keeping a garden because it keeps me connected to the seasons. That there is a time when food grows and time when it does not. We need to be ready for the seasons of harvest and the seasons of waiting. I like keeping a garden because it keeps me connected to where my food comes from. It doesn't just appear in the stand on the corner but comes from time, rain, sunlight, and dirt.

I like keeping a garden because it reminds me how much everything alive wants to live. I had friends ask me for advice on how to keep a garden and what I said was this: Plants want to grow. If you manage the basics - decent soil and fertilizer, reasonable amounts of water in reasonable cycles, ongoing weed and pest management - then you get to pull an eggplant, an aborgene, off a stem come August. You get to pull tomatoes starting in July.

I think the best part of gardening for me, however wonderful harvest can be, is the season of planting. I think its magic. You take a seed which is like a tiny little pebble. It is hard, it doesn't move, it just lays in your hand. You poke a hole in the ground, drop in a little fertilizer, drop in one or three seeds, and then cover it back up. You add water if its dry. And then you wait. You wait for days. You keep going out and looking at the dirt and thats all there is out there. Just dirt.

But then one day, there's something else. Something amazing! There's a tiny little bit of green rising up out of the earth. Often - its a stem, still bent over, still

pulling its two first leaves out of the ground. That seed, once as active as a rock, is now growing, breathing, drinking, taking up minerals and building up stems and leaves and branches and flowers. Its the most amazing thing - but the really most amazing thing is the part that happens in the dark, wet, cold ground away from our sight. The seed quickens. It softens. It comes to life.

And that is God. At work, doing what God does. Waking up new life.

1 And this is what Paul is talking about.

Planting a seed is important, Paul says. And watering that seed is also necessary, Paul says. But the most important part, the waking up of the seed into a plant - the most important part belongs to God.

Which is the same for all of us who become Christians and follow God. It is God who wakes us up. It is God who calls us into growth. We are simple seeds, full of the potential of life yet not living until God stirs us into growth, into life with Jesus.

As new Christians - even as long time Christians still growing in our faith - We still need teachers who help us change our thinking, to help us stop thinking in the old ways, the ways of the world, and instead start thinking in Jesus' way. In the world, we are taught to think, *everyone for themselves*. In Jesus' world, we need to learn how to think, *everyone for everyone*. When we first come to believe in God, when we first start to try and think and live as Jesus invites us to live - We find that we all need teachers who can tend to us, especially when we are still tender, fragile, soft new growth. But where do we find these teachers and how do we know what they teach is true?

The church in Corinth was brand new. Not only was it just a couple of years old, but Christians everywhere around the Mediterranean were just starting to invent what a congregation should be. Jesus didn't leave a manual with rules and regulations on how to live as a disciple of Jesus. Instead, Jesus sent the Holy Spirit - which we experience through each other, we experience in worship together, we experience when we study the Bible together. We find the Holy Spirit, God and Jesus among us, when we gather together. Church. This community, this congregation. Jesus promised that whenever two or more are gathered in his name, Jesus is among them in the gift of the holy spirit.

But churches can make mistakes. The leadership and the members can get confused. We can start thinking like the world again, instead of like Jesus. Its so easy to think like the world. Its how we were brought up after all. This church in Corinth was slipping back into thinking like the world. In their world, in their time, group honor was everything. No one was really seen as an individual but instead as a member of a group, a family. And if your family was highly honored and respected, then your family also had an easy time getting wealth. Enough wealth to eat everyday and to sleep someplace safe. Honor was hierarchal, there was a rank of honorable families from most honorable to...well... those people. It was possible to lose honor. Another family might come along and cast dishonor on your family. If they start being seen as stronger then your family, the wealth is going to start moving away from your family. Honor gaining and holding was very serious life and death business. Do whatever is necessary to protect your family's honor or suffer the consequences.

Jesus, of course, was not big on the honor system, the way it froze some people into wealth and others into poverty. You know that Jesus was put to death as a criminal on a cross out on the edge of town which is about as low honor status as possible. We follow a man who, in the end, had no honor but the honor of God.

The church in Corinth had hosted two teachers, two leaders if you like. Paul, who started the congregation, and Apollos, who was an associate of Paul even though they taught very differently about the transformational act of baptism. It was okay to have two different teachers, it was okay to have two different schools of thought. Remember, Jesus didn't leave a rule book, Jesus left the Holy Spirit for our counsel, for our guidance as we work out what we need to do and be as disciples of Christ in each passing century. What we need to do and be as Christians in the first century may or may not be a good match for what we need to do and be in the 21st century. Its important to debate - how is the best way to follow Jesus in this place and at this time.

But the followers of Apollos and Paul were starting to have a honor fight - not a how to follow jesus fight. They were starting to fight over who was the better teacher and therefore, who were the better students? Team Apollos might have been arguing that since Apollos was the better teacher, his students deserved to sit in the front of the sanctuary. They deserved the best part of the communion bread, the first drinks from the communion cup. Team Paul might have been

arguing that since Paul was the better teacher they should be running the church, making all the important decisions about the money, who deserves charity, what color the new rug should be. Everyone were arguing over power in the old rules of the world - *everyone for themselves*.

So Paul writes them and says, "stop." Paul writes to Corinth about this powerfight and tries to remind everyone that it doesn't matter who is the teacher. Its good to have a good teacher, a wise teacher, a teacher mature in thinking like Jesus where its all about everyone for everyone, but its not necessary to have the perfect teacher. Paul says, all of our faith comes from God. Everything we know, comes from Jesus through the Holy Spirit. Paul says, we can have a bad teacher.

Good teacher, bad teacher - It doesn't really matter, Paul says.

Because it is only God who gives the growth.

"You are God's field, God's building," Paul tells the church in Corinth and Paul tells us now as we hear this text with the Holy Spirit in our hearts and our minds.

All churches, all congregations, all disciples of Christ - we were all seeds once and are now a field of good crops growing in the sun of God's love. We are strong plants watered by God's compassionate care. We know that God does not abandon but remains with us, sending us teachers to tend us and teaching us how to tend each other. We know that the workers hired to tend a field come and go. We know the owner of the field remains steadfast, watching over the land year after year. In a time when everything seems up in the air, when the way of the how the world thinks seems to be gaining more and more power - we who live in God's beloved garden can trust that God remains with us, still sending us the teachers we need. We are not team Paul nor are we team Apollos. We are team Jesus. We are seeds, being called into life and growth by God. We will bear good crops because it pleases God to tend to us.

Let the people say: Amen

