

Sermon for July 23, 2017 (Proper11A) “A Garden Tour”

(based on Genesis 28:10-18 and Matthew 13:24-30)

(Intro: following the Gospel reading, Pastor Holly places a wide-brimmed, ribbon-decked straw hat on her head, and approaches the pulpit with the air of a tour guide...)

Hello! I'm so glad you've come, whether you're here for the garden tour or if you've just ambled by. There's still room on the garden tour—and you don't even need a ticket. If you don't think you're the garden tour type, stick around for a while anyway. You might stumble over something you like.

AREA 1: DANDELION LAWN

We'll start here, near the roadside where you've parked. This is our special dandelion lawn. Notice how the grass is extremely uneven, due to death of our old lawnmower & decision to let cows take over the mowing. They do keep the height of the grass down, in general, and they're very picturesque when they're doing it. The resulting fertilizer treatment is somewhat unevenly distributed. Dandelions have self-seeded, along with spearmint and burdock. We leave the dandelions, because the bees depend on them. The burdock we do try to pull or cut, but it keeps coming back. When I say our lawn is the talk of the neighborhood, I don't mean in a good way.

AREA 2: “VALLEY of the SHADOW” ORCHARD

Next, follow me into the slightly less-than-sunny orchard, or—as we like to call it—the Valley of the Shadow. Its most unique feature is the scrubby set of wolf pines that self-seeded the west side, following the line of the old stone wall. Their unique growth pattern is the opposite of bonsai—more like godzilla trees, looming over the spindly apple trees with their massive arms outstretched, threatening to shade them to death. A passing logger helped us take a couple down. Not sure what we'll do with all these scraggly pine branches he piled up. Watch your step!

AREA 3: PIG STY

And over here, you can see the distinct contours of our land without any pesky vegetation hiding it. In fact, we could rent this space to NASA to practice moon landings, if they hadn't cut their budget back. That's because we accepted some extra

pigs from a farmer down the road who's extra hard-up. It took us longer than we'd planned to arrange a butcher date. Those pigs had some extra time to play. They dug up every root and ate every scrap of green growth, and then some.

AREA 4: WEED-CHOKED GREENHOUSE

Now, come with me into the greenhouse. I promise, it was perfect in April: all the beds raked clean, the seeds planted in ruler-straight rows, and not a weed in sight. Now, well—you know how it is. The problem with this part of the year is that everything just GROWS! A month ago, we were weeding the kale patch, and we found a guinea hen sitting on a nest full of eggs underneath all the broad, strappy leaves. They felt so safe, so comfortable there. Isn't it sweet, that they felt so safe? Guess we'll be leaving those weeds for a while. Oh, watch your step near the tomato bed, please—the vines might get ahold of you, and we might never see you again.

He put before them another parable: "The kingdom of heaven may be compared to someone who sowed good seed in his field; but while everybody was asleep, an enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat, and then went away. So when the plants came up and bore grain, then the weeds appeared as well.

And the slaves of the householder came and said to him, 'Master, did you not sow good seed in your field? Where, then, did these weeds come from?' He answered, 'An enemy has done this.' The slaves said to him, 'Then do you want us to go and gather them?' But he replied, 'No; for in gathering the weeds you would uproot the wheat along with them.

Let both of them grow together until the harvest; and at harvest time I will tell the reapers, Collect the weeds first and bind them in bundles to be burned, but gather the wheat into my barn.'"

FINAL STOP: CLAY SLOPE

One more thing I'd like to show you on this garden tour. Come follow me up this sawdust path, to our lovely topsoil-stripped clay slope. Careful—those blackberry vines are growing into the path again. Oh, and the little oak seedlings are showing up—I guess it's time to do another round of seedling-pulling. This slope

was the edge of a forest, once, and the land never lets us forget it!

As you may know from other garden tours, the best place to grow anything is a south-facing slope. The sun touches a south-facing slope for more of the day, so the soil stays warm and you can grow things well. In case you haven't noticed, this slope faces north. Yes, we have 40 acres, and every available slope face north!

Now, take a look at the soil. The topsoil was scraped and sold by previous owners. So here, we have about six inches of pale, sandy soil on top of several inches of clay. And, because there were no other places much better, this is where we planted our blueberries, our raspberries, and two strange gift plants from my godfather: Kolomicta Kiwi vines. They're climbing up that trellis at the top of the slope. And here's the thing: This year, they'll bear fruit! Now, careful... wild raspberries seem to have tangled with the kiwi vines, and...they're loaded with fruit, too! And the rhubarb was good this year, and the blueberries look healthier than I've ever seen. See how busy the bees and hummingbirds are among the all the other hillside flowers? And oh, as you make your way back down the path, do stop and smell those roses!

[And God said,] "...I am with you and will keep you wherever you go, and will bring you back to this land; for I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you."

Then Jacob woke from his sleep and said, "Surely the LORD is in this place-- and I did not know it!"

And he was amazed, and said, "How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven."

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Let those who have ears, listen.

--Preached by Rev. Holly S. Morrison

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