

17 May 2009  
Mo. Kathleen Patton

So you'll see in your bulletin a little pink slip which does a pretty good job of explaining rogation days. It's an old English custom of blessing the fields. And we don't have any fields right at hand so we kind of brought the fields to us and that was why people brought their gardening implements and some of their starts and seeds today so that we can give thanks to God and bless our gardens which are signs of God's love.

The sixth Sunday of Easter is an intense moment in spring, isn't it? I mean, this city is astounding. I have friends visiting from Yreka and they're just like (audibly flabbergasted). Everything is so lavish and bright. You know, during Lent—which means spring by the way—you have those little crocuses beginning to pop their little puny little heads up out of the ground. Just when you were going to give up entirely on life ever coming back. And as Lent progresses you get daffodils and maybe tulips. And you get it: Oh, life is coming back, really. I mean it really is gonna happen. By the sixth week of Easter it's outrageous out there! The rhododendrons and the azaleas and all the trees are green and all the lawns are green—even those of us who don't water! Everything is exploding with color and drama!

And that's the Easter story, isn't it? That we know as Jesus is walking to the cross that there's life. But we're not—we know it but...we only sort of know it, right? We know it's coming *but...* and then comes Easter. That daffodil time. Where, yes, we know: Jesus is risen from the dead. And the disciples experience this.

You know, it's interesting in Mark's Gospel: The women, when they go to the tomb and they experience that Christ is risen, they don't tell anybody. They don't know what to do with it. They are overwhelmed. It's like 'I see those crocuses but really... Who would believe me?' And in the other Gospels, the women tell but they don't get believed. Because no one knows what to make of that new life and that resurrection right away.

That's why we have fifty days of Easter: So we can unpack it over and over and over again and really enter in this amazing mystery and let the rhododendrons bloom in our hearts.

And so the stories of the disciples grow and multiply as they begin to get it, as they experience the risen Christ. There's the great story about the fish and the beach, and all these stories where they don't recognize Jesus. They see him but they don't recognize him. There's the road to Emmaus and there's Mary in the garden and there's the beach story with the fish—it's because they don't expect it, they don't understand it, and they don't know how to make sense of it. But they start to get it more and more.

So in today's Gospel story, we not only have these disciples in whom the risen life of Christ has begun to bear fruit, we not only have them living Jesus life but taking things even a step farther. They go to the Gentiles and they're amazed because they have open hearts. They allow the possibility that the Holy Spirit can work in people that they

had written off. Before they're even baptized. And they say to each other: Okay, I guess we have to baptize these people because the Holy Spirit is surely at work in them so okay. And they take it to the next step and the Holy Spirit takes them to the next step and they blossom. They blossom and the church blossoms and it takes off like [crazy].

Jesus says in today's Gospel: "Abide in me." I love that word. I mean, it means 'live within'. Like in a house. Like your whole life taking place within. And then he says: "If you abide in me, you will bear much fruit." This isn't the vines and the branches text—we had that last week. But he's recalling that. If you live in me—in other words, if you stay rooted and grounded in the reality of my love and my ongoing life, you will bear fruit. It will just come naturally. If you place yourself in Christ, you ground yourself in God and let your purpose and your vision be directed by God, the outcome is going to be joy and love. Things that will last.

Jesus says: "Fruit that will last." Now fruit doesn't last in my house—I don't know about yours—but it either gets eaten or sent to the compost. But there are some things that do last. Jesus talked about this because he's going to show them what doesn't last. This is his last meal with his disciples where he's having this conversation with them and they're about to witness him die. The body does die. Death is real. And it's part of life. But life goes on through it. And what lasts? The fruit that lasts forever is this life, the love of Christ that comes to fruition so gloriously in the disciples and in us when we obey his command to love one another. When we care for another. That fruit lasts, that love lasts. Forever.

I want to say a couple of words about gardening as a spiritual practice. God gets to me in the garden. I don't know how else to put it. It's just one of those places I can go full of my own thoughts and problems and issues and somehow—maybe it's the humility of it, maybe it's being on my knees in the dirt—I got this crust of garden dirt under my nails that I couldn't get out. And it reminds you of where you come from and what you're made of, I suppose, if you want to think about it. But mostly it just gets in touch with spiders and sow bugs and humus, compost. It revives your trust in the miraculous. Because, you know, I stick those things in the ground and some of them grow. I have nothing to do with it. I do not decide. I do not create those spectacular flowers that bloom.

And patience...I put blueberries in about six years ago and we had enough for a snack one afternoon. And then we had enough for a bowl of cereal. And then it was like a bowl of cereal every day for several days, you know, a couple of weeks maybe. And last year we had enough so that all three of us could have blueberries on our cereal for a couple of weeks. And this year? We may get a pie! And guess what? *I had nothing to do with any of it.* All I did was stick those things in the ground. I rooted them and grounded them in our not-so-great soil and didn't bother to feed them or nothing. [A] Little water now and then. God's job. God gives the growth. Rooted and grounded in God's soil and phew...they're covered now, covered with little white [blooms]—and the bees come and do their thing and we're going to have blueberries.

And the mustard greens! Yesterday I was planting—it was a pretty warm day yesterday and I brought a bunch of plant starts home from the farmer's market and my mustard greens are sitting over there in the front—I don't know, you know, I've never planted mustard greens before. And by the end of the day, I look over and my mustard greens are like phhhhhh! They just completely—I decided at that moment that mustard greens don't like full sun. And so... I planted them in a cooler spot in the yard where they won't get full sun all day. And do you know what? This morning? **Thanks be to God!** They rose from the dead!

It teaches—and it's all mixed together, the death and the life and the garden. I mean, that's just how it is. That great compost, that great broken down stuff and all the things that go and eat the soil and eat the plants. I think one of the spiritualities of being in the garden is just being present in the moment. I mean, at first, when I first start working and it's so hot and sweaty and I'm worried about getting dirty and by the end of the day I've forgotten all of it. You know, I'm a mess. I didn't—wouldn't—take a bath with myself last night. I took a shower instead. It was scary.

But the feeling of just being here now—I think that's one of the most wonderful gifts of it. It just puts us in the presence with life and death and God and air and soil.

I've had the privilege lately of working in the Northlake Garden and it's not far from here and I commend it to you next time you're walking in the neighborhood. Walk by Northlake. There's a student garden over there that Ian Thompson has so beautifully choreographed this year. He's really made it into something very, very special with raised beds. They're putting in corn. They've got all kinds of berries. They've got all kinds of squash. They've got lettuce. They've got—you name it. It's happening. A beautiful greenhouse. And on Thursdays I get to go over and help so don't call me Thursday morning because I'm not here, I'm at Northlake helping the kids put in the garden. And I want to tell you two little stories from that.

One little boy, [a] fourth grader - I take them out about six at a time along with another volunteer and we set them to work doing this or that - and we had a couple of six packs of lettuce to plant and I said, "Well, I want you guys to take out your good gardening skills." And this one little guy, this little jock, says, "I don't have any gardening skills." He says, "I just have sports skills." Which sounded like bragging but I knew what he was saying was really 'I don't think much of myself: I can only do one thing.' I said, "I don't believe that about you but let me show you." And so I showed him how to put the lettuce in and then I walked away and went and worked with someone else. And when I came back, not only had this little boy planted his six pack of lettuce but he had overseen the other two little boys that were with him and helped them to plant their six packs of lettuce and it was the most beautiful little, you know, raised bed full of lettuce and these boys were just beaming with a sense of accomplishment, having participated in this life-giving thing.

And then there's another little guy who I know is going through a rough time and has had some serious trouble with depression. He comes out and Ian tells me to have the kids plant chives among the strawberries because chives and strawberries are friends. Okay. I wouldn't put chives and strawberries together because that sounds nasty, but apparently they're friends. So I told the boys about this and we already had the strawberries out and so they had this, you know, couple of flats of chives and they're planting away. And after a while I come back and this little guy says to me: "When I have a house"—he lives in an apartment now—"when I have a house, I'm going to have a whole yard full of strawberries and chives." Something about that just—there's hope in that, there's life in that, there's something about that that tells us about God. And I can't put my finger on it. But I sure give thanks for it.

Jesus says, "Abide in me." Be rooted, be grounded, in the power and the rhythm and the beauty of life in all things. In all things. Jesus had the courage to say this on the eve of his death. He was the seed that was sown. That every life may be Christ's life and every death may be a doorway to new life.

Amen.