

God... Unexpected: Gardener

Reconnect – May 16, 2010

Text: John 15:1-5;

Key Thought: Making and keeping a connection with God gives us true life and purpose in His care.

[Jesus said,] “I am the true grapevine, and my Father is the gardener. He cuts off every branch of mine that doesn’t produce fruit, and he prunes the branches that do bear fruit so they will produce even more. You have already been pruned and purified by the message I have given you. Remain in me, and I will remain in you. For a branch cannot produce fruit if it is severed from the vine, and you cannot be fruitful unless you remain in me.” “Yes, I am the vine; you are the branches. Those who remain in me, and I in them, will produce much fruit. For apart from me you can do nothing. John 15:1-5, NLT

Intro: “Not just a garden” (The Tulip Festival) (Brian)

- We were down at the Tulip Festival yesterday – I hadn’t been since I was a kid
- So there we were, along with all kinds of other “great unwashed”, eating \$3 hot dogs and \$4 BeaverTails, and looking at flowers, while trying to get our kids to stay still for pictures
- If you don’t know much about the festival, you might think “Why is this such a big deal? It’s a bunch of plants along the side of the road...!”
- It is, that – but the variety, the colours, the care that has gone into breeding these flowers and then cultivating them – it’s a real spectacle
- By the way, if you’re wondering, I checked – you’re not allowed to tiptoe through the tulips
- But it’s not just a garden – it’s more than that – it’s a picture of a relationship
- During WWII the Netherlands was overrun by the Nazis, and some of their royal family fled to Canada, as government in exile here – Princess Margriet was born here during that time
- And ever since the liberation of the Dutch at the end of WWII, in which Canada played a huge part, the Dutch government has sent a gift each year of 10,000 of the best tulip bulbs in the world, which they have bred and developed for centuries
- It’s not just a garden – it’s a picture of a relationship – it’s gratitude – sometimes a garden is much more than “just a garden”

God the Gardener? (Randy)

- That makes me think of the very first garden, actually – in a little out-of-the-way spot called “Eden”
- God creates the heavens and the earth in six days, and then takes a break on the seventh
- The world is now fully formed and in place – He can do anything He wants to – He’s created this incredible, perfect environment with limitless potential
- And before anything else, God makes... a garden – and then he subcontracts it out to the first people that He made, and He makes it their life’s work - He teaches them to do what He loves
- Clearly, gardens matter to God – and He’s not happy when they screw it up, either

Q: Is anyone here a gardener? Anyone have a “green thumb”? What do you like about gardening? What inspires you to even do it?

Last answer is Randy’s answer – he doesn’t really like it but he does it – for the sake of his property, and for love – because it will make Jen happy

God the Gardener (Brian)

- God describes Himself as a gardener – in the section that was read earlier on this morning, Jesus compares God the Father to a gardener

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- Mary thinks Jesus is the gardener when he rises from the dead and she sees him for the first time after

(Randy)

Q: Why do you think that God describes Himself as a gardener? Why would He choose that image?

- It describes what He does in the lives of people – how He cares for us and works to change us all at the same time, while protecting us and giving us life

The Garden of Life – who draws the line? (Brian)

Brian – the edge of the garden is the limit of the gardener’s care –a garden is the vision of the gardener and it reflects his or her priorities and his or her sense of beauty and worth (Grandpa Harris and his garden, as a kid)

- Story: Grandpa Harris and his garden, as a kid
- Comparison between what a gardener does in a garden with what God does in our lives – weed and feed
- Sometimes the gardener makes decisions that not everyone understands or appreciates – pulling a weed, tearing out a section of plants – pruning a tree – but in time the wisdom of the decision is shown
- Weeds – the dandelion fight on our hands in Barrhaven
- Barrhaven lawns/obsession
- Big money in lawncare, aeration – where you turn your lawn into little bits of poop and supposedly it helps it later on – but you can never really tell the difference after a month or so
- It’s letting life do what it was made to, while holding back or eliminating anything else that would get in its way

Over to Randy – story about planting a tree and then having to pull it up, and why, and the process of that, what that meant

- We don't always understand what God is doing or what He's up to – He doesn't make mistakes, but He does see the long view – we have things that we are really proud of in our lives – our accomplishments, our bank balances, our stuff – we wrap it up with our identity and self-worth – and when we lose those things that we identify with, we blame God – we get angry at Him, we think He's out to get us – because we don't want to give up the tree we planted – but in God's eyes, as the gardener, he sees that the tree is all wrong – it's affecting foundational things in our lives – neighbour's fence (what God does in our lives has the potential to affect other people for good as well – Randy's neighbours like him more now that he made the sacrifice to get rid of the tree)

Randy – “wild versus cultivated”

Q: Where do I stand in relation to God's garden, to God's care?

“Grafted in” – how we come to find ourselves in God's garden (under His care) – how can a person find themselves there? How does God bring us in to what He's doing?

We have to be willing to see it happen, and we have to be willing to change and to accept change – we're going from being one sort of thing to another sort of thing – a better version of ourselves that we don't fully understand

Key Thought:

Making and keeping a connection with God gives us true life and purpose in His care.

I have loved you even as the Father has loved me. Remain in my love. When you obey my commandments, you remain in my love, just as I obey my Father's commandments and remain in his love. I have told you these things so that you will be filled with my joy. Yes, your joy will overflow! **John 15:9-11**

- We are the garden – there are things in our life that will always be contested – we have to be continually be plugged into Him – remain in me and I will remain in you – He's our source of life – we have to stay in the garden, and keep allowing Him to do His work in us, keep working with him

Conclusion: (Brian)

- My project in grade 4 styro cups – carrots versus garlic – sometimes something has to die for something else to grow

²⁴ I tell you the truth, unless a kernel of wheat is planted in the soil and dies, it remains alone. But its death will produce many new kernels—a plentiful harvest of new lives. John 12:24 NLT

- Jesus dies to bring us life – but we only can find life when we are connected to Him

"A society grows great when old men plant trees whose shade they know they shall never sit in."
Greek proverb

"The trees you plant today are the shade for the children of tomorrow" – what God is doing in us right now will get passed on as shade and oxygen for those who are to come after us

"What is God doing? He is saving; he is rescuing; he is blessing; he is providing; he is judging; he is healing; he is enlightening. There is a spiritual war in progress, an all-out moral battle. There is evil and cruelty; unhappiness and illness. There is superstition and ignorance, brutality and pain. God is in continuous and energetic battle against all of it. God is for life and against death. God is for love and against hate. God is for hope and against despair. God is for heaven and against hell. There is no neutral ground in the universe. Every square foot of space is contested." **Eugene Peterson, Run With The Horses, p41**