

Sermon for July 30, 2017
Preached in the ADK
Romans 8:26-39

Confessions of a Wayward Gardener
*A Secret Look into the Seedy Gardening Life of
Hillary Raining*

*The following dialogue exposes the inner working of
this would-be gardener. They are excerpts from the
last garden I tried to start and the journal entries
that would have accompanied the journey.*

Entry One -New Year's Resolution

Normally when I make

New Year's resolutions,

I have to worry about

all of the sacrifices

that I will have to make

in order to

keep them up.

But not this one—

I am going to start

a garden!

Ever since we moved to Bethlehem

I have known

that I was going

to start a garden.

And not just any garden—

this is going to be

the kind of garden

that changes the way

my family and I live.

This garden

is going to slash our grocery bills,

add beauty to our property,

and help us go organic.

In fact,

I am finally going to be

one of those moms

who grows and cooks
all her own food
and makes saving the world
look super easy—
and let's not forget—
super cool.

I can just picture myself
bringing my friends
bunches of flowers
along with a dish of
fresh basil and tomato salad.

"Oh, this?"

I would say,
"just a little something
from my garden."

On top of all of that
I am going to devote

one section to being
a meditation corner.

Better food,

less money,

going green,

AND a closer relationship

with God?!

No problem

with this super gardener.

And really,

this should be easy for me.

I have worked on farms

while growing up

and my parents

have always been

major gardeners.

This will be a snap.

Early April

Finally, winter is over!

When I look out my window

where my garden will be,

I feel like that passage

from Psalm 128

“You shall eat the fruit of your labor; *

happiness and prosperity shall be yours.

3 Your wife shall be like a fruitful vine within your

house, *

your children like olive shoots round about your

table.”

Time to lay

the foundation

and start planting.

I was able to plant

the first flower today.

It was the lily that
was given to me
at our Easter service this year.

What better way
to mark this garden
as a new creation
then to plant an Easter Lily,
the very symbol
of the resurrection?!

Perfect!

Now all I have to do
is get started
on the rest

Late April

Still only the lily...

Early May

The lily has wilted
and looks like it
has died.

And it is still the only
plant out there.

Yes, I know

I am not exactly
moving on this,
but things have come up.

I feel badly

about the

lily

and even worse about
what the symbolism
now looks like.

Much less an expression

about my excitement
for the resurrection
and much more.

An expression
of how other things
can become priorities
over my spiritual life
so quickly.

OK- Enough of this
wallowing in self pity!

Time to really start this garden!

Late May

Like I said!

NOW it's really time
to start this garden!

The ground is broken,

the plants are finally
in the ground
and now it's time
to start maintaining it
and watching it grow.

Early August

Umm....

I'm not going
to lie to you,
things have gotten
a little out of hand
in the backyard.

And by a little out-of-hand

I mean CRAZY!

After I planted,
we had what felt like

weeks

and weeks

of rain.

This created the double problem

of keeping me inside

while the plants

just grew like weeds.

In fact, I think

that they are mostly weeds.

Then we went away for two weeks

with a few days

in between.

At this point,

I can't even see

where most

of the plants

I planted are.

There is some kind of vine
that has just wrapped itself
around all of the other plants
and is threatening to choke
all of them to death!

At this point,
the only things
that I will be harvesting
are weeds!

But the truth is
the weeds are not
the only thing
that I have let
get out of hand
this summer.

I don't think
that I am alone

in kind of “drifting”
in my spiritual life
during the summer seasons.

It can be very easy
to just come to church
(or not)
and go home
and not really
keep up
with any other spiritual disciplines
like prayer,
journaling
or yes—
even gardening.

After all,
there are so few
big church events

to help us mark our time
in the summer.

There is no Advent
to help us remember
Jesus' presence with us
in human form.

There is no Lent
to help us
really take stock
in our relationship
with God.

There is no Pentecost
to remind us
that the Holy Spirit
moves and dwells with us.

And there is no
Easter to show us

that as Christians,
we have the gift
of new birth—
the gift of new life—
the gift of being
resurrected anew.

And so,
when other things
begin to creep
into my life
and take over my time like weeds,
I can let myself
and my relationship
with God
get overgrown.

I feel weak in the spirit,
like Paul talks about in his letter to the Romans.

Instead of bearing fruits

I have let other things

come in

and choke my relationship

with God

like that insidious vine

killing my plants.

I planted crops

hoping to have

first fruits

that would be enriching

and sustaining.

But instead,

when I let weeds take over,

my first fruits

are trash.

During the church year,

I planted the seeds of
joy with Jesus,
the seeds
of growth with God,
the seeds
of life
with the Holy Spirit.

But when I let
other things in my life
take over,
my first fruits
of the soul
are hallow,
empty,
and lacking.

But that all changes now.

I will not let
this summer of drifting
define my garden
or my spiritual life.

I am going to
get out there and
start pulling those weeds.

And while I am at it,

I am going to spend
more time in prayer
and in Bible study
to actually treat

this time
as the green growing season
that I know my soul needs.

As it says
in Romans,

“The Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but that very Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words.”

But I keep getting in the Spirit’s way!

I am through
with deceiving myself.

I am not really
a gardener
until I have tended to my garden
and pulled out
the sordid
and rank growth
that has taken over.

In the same way,
I am not really
a doer of God’s word
until I actually

begin to rid myself
of the rank growth
that has taken over my
relationship with Christ.

Now,
where did I put
my garden gloves?

Mid-August

I am amazed.

I am in awe.

I am eating a salad

made entirely

from things

that are harvested

from my garden!

It took days

to reclaim

that garden.

I started in the very back

and just kept pulling

and pulling.

Some sections were

harder than others.

That vine took

the most work.

I had to unwrap it

from all of the plants

in order to save them

and that required

some delicacy.

But it was worth it!

What I found out there

were plants,

flowers,

and vegetables!

I have already been able

to cook with many of them

and decorate the house

with some of the prettiest ones.

But that was not

all that I found out there

in the wayward garden.

I found Jesus.

In pulling out the weeds

from the ground,

I was taking the time

to pull out

some of the things

that were stealing my time

with God.

In unwrapping
that vine
from around my plants
I was also
taking the time
to unwind the one
that had grown
around my heart.

An the most amazing thing I found
was Jesus' promise to me.

The promise to always be there,
even when I'm not.

The promise
of being the first fruits
of his creatures.

The promise
of a resurrected life.

In fact that last promise
was right where it
had been planted
so many months ago.
Because the last thing
that I found
among those weeds
was the Easter lily
planted so many months ago.
And not only
had it somehow
come back
alive and well
and strong
and green.
But—and I kid you not—
there were now two of them.

TWO!?

When I saw them

I gave two prayers of thanks.

One for the seeds

of love

and joy

and faith

that had been planted

in my life.

And the other

for the grace

and gift

of being able

to come back

to those seeds

again and again and again

and be born a new

in Christ.

Even when

I think

I've all but killed them.

The lily reminds me

that Christ

can not

and will not

stay dead—

not in the ground,

not in the tomb,

and not in our lives.

As Paul tells us,

“neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation,

will be able to separate us from the love of God in
Christ Jesus our Lord.”

Not even a wayward gardener
like myself.