

Genesis 17:1-7, 15-16  
Psalm 22:22-30  
Romans 4:13-25  
MARK 8:31-38

## Spiritual Weeds and Seeds

“What shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his soul?”  
In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

It really feels this weekend like Spring is coming, doesn't it – at least yesterday and today, and at least with Daylight Savings Time kicking in last night. We'll be back in the 30s and 40s soon, but still we know that spring is coming. And this time of year some peoples' thoughts turn from snow shoveling to *gardening*. Sounds nice, right?

Whatever the weather, and whether or not we have “green thumbs” – or gardens – the season of *Lent* is the time for some *gardening of the soul*. Physical gardening involves pulling weeds and planting seeds; so does the gardening of the soul. Lent is a time for identifying and pulling “spiritual weeds” – attitudes, habits and other behaviors which are *not* the “good fruit” God wants us to bear.

Holding grudges, being stingy, greed, self pity, resentment, jealousy, not budgeting time for prayer and Bible reading, being “too busy” to help others in need – there are all kinds of possibilities for the “spiritual weeds” which may be in our own gardens of the soul. Make a list of your own “weeds” and resolve to “get down on your hands and knees” – especially your knees either literally or metaphorically if your spirit is willing but the flesh is weak – and ask God to help you identify the “weeds” in your soul that you need to “pull out” – regularly. Weeds can be awfully persistent and need regular work, one day at a time. If we don't devote time, insight and energy to do this, weeds will start taking charge of our gardens. And if we don't pull spiritual “weeds” in Lent, when will we do it?

The scariest thought of all is this: if someone thinks he or she *has* no spiritual weeds, it may be that the weeds have so taken over his or her garden that she or he has forgotten what a flower looks like.

So here are some flowers we can all plant, or plant again, and again, and again: “love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.” That's St. Paul's list from Galatians 5, and it's a good list – but there are also other beautiful seeds we can plant in our gardens which will bear much fruit, enough fruit to feed thousands, maybe more.

But the “seed” I'd like to focus on today is **faithfulness** because today, like every year on the Second Sunday in Lent, we hear part of the story of Abraham, the great

ancestor in faith of over 2 billion people: Jews, Christians and Muslims all over the world.

And thinking of Abraham's faithfulness as a "seed" which he "planted" and which multiplied more than the loaves and fishes which a little boy gave Jesus for the feeding of the 5,000 is paradoxical for two reasons. First, when Abraham first decided to have faith in the one real God, his physical "seed" had produced exactly nothing. He was childless and 75 years old, and his wife was way, way past menopause. Yet God promised him not once but many times, as in today's first reading, "I will make you exceedingly fruitful. And I will make nations of you," in fact "*I have made you* the ancestor of a multitude of nations."

Second, it's funny to think of Abraham's faithfulness as a "seed" which produced "fruit" because he was not a farmer or even a gardener: he was a shepherd with flocks of goats and sheep who wandered around depending on where the "still waters" and the "green pastures" were. Farmers have to stay in one place, preferably year after year to rotate crops and enrich the soil; Abraham might not necessarily have camped for 12 consecutive months next to the same oasis or well.

But he was a "spiritual gardener" who "bore fruit" which was of, well, biblical proportions. God does have a sense of humor after all: a childless nomad became one of the most fruitful people in history. As the angel later said to him, "Is anything too hard for the Lord?"

*Let us ask ourselves that question* if we ever get discouraged with our "spiritual gardening." Will we ever see the end of "weeds"? Will the "seeds" we plant ever sprout and bear fruit?

And the other really funny thing about fruitful Abraham, the spiritual gardener, is that the first task God gave him was to *uproot himself*. "Go from the land of your forefathers to the land that I will show you." That was all the directions God gave him. Next follows three of the most amazing words in the Bible: "So Abram went."

Abram did not leave Iraq because he was jobless, or bereft, or because of famine or other natural disaster or political instability or because he wanted to move to Florida and play shuffleboard. He left Iraq for what would become the Holy Land because God was calling him to go somewhere else and to *be someone* else.

Abraham gave up being a pagan Babylonian who believed in the gods which I described in last week's sermon as powerful, selfish, arbitrary, destructive and prone to playing favorites to take a chance on believing in this God called The Lord of whom no one had ever heard before.

Never in the long history of human journeying has anyone believed so much on such little basis. Abraham's trip was *totally* on faith. He, a childless nomad, was promised a homeland and descendants "as numerous of the stars of heaven."

And as you may have heard, "God's check cleared."

We may feel like our faith is puny compared to Abraham's; I sure do. I feel like I'm raising one measly little crocus and there's Abraham and his sequoia towering over the forest. *But even sequoias started as seeds.* Plant your seed. Nurture it. Water it, fertilize it, pull weeds which may crowd it. Faithfulness is a seed which can grow and grow enough to lift ourselves – and others – up with enduring strength.

Abraham could have stayed where he was and been a prosperous shepherd, camped out near a major river which would always provide for his flocks and his relatives and servants and himself. Instead, he took the risk of following God to the mountains of Syria and Canaan and depending on God to guide him to where he could survive and then prosper, to where he would indeed have sons and ultimately a multitude of descendants. He did not seek to gain the whole world but to gain his soul, and God granted him family and prosperity as well.

Blessed Lent. Happy gardening.

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