

Call to Worship Psalm 24 & 104

The earth is the LORD'S and everything in it. **From your lofty house, you water the mountains. The earth is filled full by the fruit of what you've done.**

You make grass grow for cattle; **you make plants for human farming in order to get food from the ground. We come today to celebrate these blessings.**

Prayer of Invocation

A Hindu Prayer

**May the waters flow peacefully; may the herbs and plants grow peacefully; may all the divine powers bring unto us peace. May the rain come down in the proper time, may the earth yield plenty of corn, may the country be free from war. The supreme Lord is peace. Amen.**

The Word **Genesis 1:9-13; 2:4-9**

God said, "Let the waters under the sky come together into one place so that the dry land can appear." And that's what happened. God named the dry land Earth, and he named the gathered waters Seas. God saw how good it was. **God said, "Let the earth grow plant life: plants yielding seeds and fruit trees bearing fruit with seeds inside it, each according to its kind throughout the earth." And that's what happened.**

The earth produced plant life: plants yielding seeds, each according to its kind, and trees bearing fruit with seeds inside it, each according to its kind. **God saw how good it was. There was evening and there was morning: the third day.**

This is the [second] account of the heavens and the earth when they were created. On the day the LORD God made earth and sky, **before any wild plants appeared on the earth, and before any field crops grew, because the LORD God hadn't yet sent rain on the earth and there was still no human being to farm the fertile land,**

the LORD God formed the human from the topsoil of the fertile land and blew life's breath into his nostrils. The human came to life. **The LORD God planted a garden in Eden in the east and put there the human he had formed. In the fertile land, the LORD God grew every beautiful tree with edible fruit,** and also he grew the tree of life in the middle of the garden and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

Living the Word

The Word that we read together this morning is part of two creation stories. Did you know that the creation story is told twice in Genesis? In the first story the plants arrive on day three, but human isn't created until day six. In the second story God held back on the plants until there was rain to water them and humans to tend to them. Whichever version you like best, they both tell of the thoughtfulness and care that God had, from the beginning, for the plants and the soil.

If you talk to a farmer, one who cares for the earth and the plants, you would hear about more than just the livelihood they acquire through these gifts of God. My dad was a farmer, my brother, Dan is a farmer and my husband, Bob is a farmer. When we first married, Bob would come in from the fields

dusty and dirty, with mud on his boots. I would try to tell him to shake of the dirt outside. I didn't appreciate his response for a long time as he said "That is earth, not dirt."

Then one day he said "It is the soil that I work" and I better understood. Bob has a true appreciation for this gift of soil that he and God create food in for others. Now I invite him to leave the soil in the fields...But to a farmer, who works the land, it is holy ground. For the gardeners who get it under your fingernails and between your toes in order to grow your food, it is holy ground. Without the soil to grow in there would be few plants.

So the planting is done. And the waiting begins. We aren't a very patient people. One year I tried a new gadget which allowed me to plant my tomatoes upside down in topsy-turvy planters.

I had 24 tomatoes, and I watered them every day and then I would check to see if they have turned any closer to red. Every afternoon after I water them from above on the deck, I would go down the stairs and count them and decide if they look any less green. Sister Cindy was home that summer and brought me some tomatoes from her friend's garden...they were good. I could go to the farmer's market and buy my own – I know they would be good, too. But I am trying to be patient as I wait for my own to be ready.

James 5:7,8 say this: "*Therefore, brothers and sisters, you must be patient as you wait for the coming of the Lord. Consider the farmer who waits patiently for the coming of rain in the fall and spring, looking forward to the precious fruit of the earth. You also must wait patiently, strengthening your resolve, because the coming of the Lord is near.*"

Gardeners and farmers both know that with a crop, and the fruit, timing is everything. I am anxiously waiting for Sept. 1. In 2014, the end of August brought a beautiful golden field of oats to be harvested. The evening of August 31, the combine made the first round of the field in anticipation of a great harvest. The next morning at 8:30am a crazy hail storm blew in with driving hail which continued until every stalk of straw, every grain of oats laid on the ground.

Most of the soy bean leaves were stripped and the sweet corn had bruises through the husks and into the kernels. Most of the crops for that year were lost. Clean up and salvage took disheartening time, but had to be done. For Hamblin Farms it was the second year in a row of major crop loss because of the drought the year before.

Bob looked very dejected and said more than once that it might be time to quit planting. He was silent about it most of the winter. We harvested trees from our woods to cover some of the losses and were very thankful for our good jobs to keep us going. Late winter, when the first seed catalogs arrived, I saw a spark back in the farmer's eyes. Soon he was sketching the fields in his yearly crop book and ordering seed. He could not, NOT plant those fields.

This year, the oats are turning gold again, September 1 is soon, and I am praying for a good harvest. Jesus had a word for me here...In Luke 12:25-28, Jesus reminds me where my heart should be: "<sup>25</sup> *Who among you by worrying can add a single moment to your life?* <sup>26</sup> *If you can't do such a small thing, why worry about the rest?*"

*<sup>27</sup> Notice how the lilies grow. They don't wear themselves out with work, and they don't spin cloth. But I say to you that even Solomon in all his splendor wasn't dressed like one of these. <sup>28</sup> If God dresses grass in the field so beautifully, even though it's alive today and tomorrow it's thrown into the furnace, how much more will God do for you, you people of weak faith!"*

That is the blessing of plants and soil. They have so many great lessons to teach us. Jesus also used plants and soil to tell the parables of who we are as people. The parable of the soil is a familiar one: *"A farmer went out to scatter seed. <sup>4</sup> As he was scattering seed, some fell on the path, and birds came and ate it. <sup>5</sup> Other seed fell on rocky ground where the soil was shallow. They sprouted immediately because the soil wasn't deep.*

*<sup>6</sup> But when the sun came up, it scorched the plants, and they dried up because they had no roots. <sup>7</sup> Other seed fell among thorny plants. The thorny plants grew and choked them. <sup>8</sup> Other seed fell on good soil and bore fruit, in one case a yield of one hundred to one, in another case a yield of sixty to one, and in another case a yield of thirty to one. <sup>9</sup> Everyone who has ears should pay attention."*  
Matthew 13:3-9

But the one that intrigues me more is The Parable of the Weeds, Matthew 13:24-30 - *<sup>24</sup> "Jesus told them another parable: "The kingdom of heaven is like someone who planted good seed in his field. <sup>25</sup> While people were sleeping, an enemy came and planted weeds among the wheat and went away. <sup>26</sup> When the stalks sprouted and bore grain, then the weeds also appeared. <sup>27</sup> "The servants of the landowner came and said to him, 'Master, didn't you plant good seed in your field? Then how is it that it has weeds?' <sup>28</sup> "An enemy has done this,' he answered. "The servants said to him, 'Do you want us to go and gather them?'*

*<sup>29</sup> "But the landowner said, 'No, because if you gather the weeds, you'll pull up the wheat along with them. <sup>30</sup> Let both grow side by side until the harvest. And at harvest time I'll say to the harvesters, "First gather the weeds and tie them together in bundles to be burned. But bring the wheat into my barn." "'*

It is much harder to see the full meaning behind this parable, but we can assume that it is not for us to separate the weeds and the wheat. That work is for God. Rather than spending our time deciding who is wheat and who is a weed, as we all have fallen short of perfection, we need to strive to be who God calls us to be which includes loving all of God's creation. There may be worth even within what seems unworthy. God sees it all from a very different angle than we do.

Like our lives, the plants and the soil have a life cycle. Death is a part of that cycle. Jesus was clear about this and spoke in words we can understand to help us in our grieving and in our moving forward. John 12:23-25

*"<sup>23</sup> Jesus replied, "The time has come for the Human One to be glorified. <sup>24</sup> I assure you that unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it can only be a single seed. But if it dies, it bears much fruit. <sup>25</sup> Those who love their lives will lose them, and those who hate their lives in this world will keep them forever."*

I share these words at Committal services. Each time I read the line "*But if it dies, it bears much fruit*" then I remember the cycle of life. Every time I hear a baby cry or a child wiggling in church, I remember the cycle of life. As I look at your faces, some of which have changes since I came four years ago – or I look in the mirror, then I remember the cycle of life. Just as we will all grow older, we will all someday die.

We can learn from the plants and trees, they can teach us what a blessing it is to give to each other. My first weekend as a pastor, I was called to do a celebration of life for Merrill Bartels. I was so new and didn't know the family, yet I was asked by his son to read the story that I will share with you now.

### The Giving Tree By Shel Silverstein,

Once there was a tree....and she loved a little boy. And every day the boy would come and he would gather her leaves and make them into crowns and play king of the forest. He would climb up her trunk and swing from her branches and eat apples. And they would play hide-and-go-seek. And when he was tired, he would sleep in her shade. And the boy loved the tree.... very much. And the tree was happy.

But time went by. And the boy grew older. And the tree was often alone. Then one day the boy came to the tree and the tree said, "Come, Boy, come and climb up my trunk and swing from my branches and eat apples and play in my shade and be happy." "I am too big to climb and play" said the boy. "I want to buy things and have fun. I want some money?" "I'm sorry," said the tree, "but I have no money. I have only leaves and apples. Take my apples, Boy, and sell them in the city. Then you will have money and you will be happy." And so the boy climbed up the tree and gathered her apples and carried them away. And the tree was happy.

But the boy stayed away for a long time....and the tree was sad. And then one day the boy came back and the tree shook with joy and she said, "Come, Boy, climb up my trunk and swing from my branches and be happy."

"I am too busy to climb trees," said the boy. "I want a house to keep me warm," he said.

"I want a wife and I want children, and so I need a house. Can you give me a house?"

"I have no house," said the tree.

"The forest is my house, but you may cut off my branches and build a house. Then you will be happy." And so the boy cut off her branches and carried them away to build his house. And the tree was happy.

But the boy stayed away for a long time. And when he came back, the tree was so happy she could hardly speak. "Come, Boy," she whispered, "come and play." "I am too old and sad to play," said the boy. "I want a boat that will take me far away from here. Can you give me a boat?" "Cut down my trunk and make a boat," said the tree.

"Then you can sail away...and be happy."

And so the boy cut down her trunk and made a boat and sailed away.

And the tree was happy ... but not really.

And after a long time the boy came back again. "I am sorry, Boy,"

said the tree," but I have nothing left to give you - My apples are gone."

"My teeth are too weak for apples," said the boy.

"My branches are gone," said the tree. "You cannot swing on them - "

"I am too old to swing on branches," said the boy.

"My trunk is gone, " said the tree. "You cannot climb - " "I am too tired to climb" said the boy.

"I am sorry," sighed the tree. "I wish that I could give you something....

but I have nothing left. I am just an old stump. I am sorry...."

"I don't need very much now," said the boy. "just a quiet place to sit and rest. I am very tired."

"Well," said the tree, straightening herself up as much as she could,

"well, an old stump is good for sitting and resting. Come, Boy, sit down. Sit down and rest."

And the boy did. And the tree was happy.

### The Giving Tree, 1964.

That weekend in 1997, my first as a pastor, I knew I was in the right place doing what God had called me to do. Yet God, had another surprise for me that I didn't receive until fourteen years later. As the new pastor in New Richmond, WI, I was eagerly greeted by one of the leaders of the church, Ted Bartels, the son who had asked me to read the Giving Tree when his father died. We never know what surprises God has for us as God continues to bless us.

"The earth is the Lord's and everything in it."

Realize that you live on holy ground, surrounded by holy growth. What a blessing!