

Sermon – May 22, 2022

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Here in this region of Western New York we are mostly in Hardiness Zones 5 or 6. Following the guidance of this “map” we learn what kinds of plants will thrive and when to plant them. We can learn about those that adjust to cold, tolerate heat, what amount of water is best, and how many hours of sunlight are required. We may find information about what kinds of plants are less appetizing to our animal friends or ones to plant that grow well together.

As I researched for my homily, I was re-educated-had brought to mind things that I sort of recall but hadn't really thought of for a time. Many of us have walked through a greenhouse where moisture, temperature and sunlight are finely calibrated for ideal growing conditions. There is a time, though, when nursery plants go through a period called hardening, where the plants don't grow up, rather they set their roots deeper, nourishing themselves. This is in preparation for the “real world” when they'll be planted in less sheltered places and where in exposure to the daily elements of their surroundings they aren't as protected.

Okay, I see you knitting your brows and I suspect you're thinking, “what on earth is she talking about and how the heck does this relate to today's reading?!” Well, it is Rogation Sunday (if you aren't familiar with this term, I invite you to check it out.) I am, as you've no doubt learned, passionate about Creation Spirituality and Creation Care. So, yes, please think about honoring Mother Earth and giving thanks for all the good gifts and bounty she provides and how it is you may be able to contribute to her sustainability. But this isn't my focus today-so-imagine with me as I connect the dots.

Today's reading from Acts continues the story of Paul's journey...We recall that the former Paul had been a “nursery plant”, comfortable in the old teachings, fed and watered, with no desire to move someplace else in God's Garden. Rather than being made hardy and prepared to go into the world and be planted in another place, his heart had been hardened to persecute Jesus Followers. Then he was so rooted by his conversion experience, his soul-deep encounter with God, that he was awake to the promptings of the Holy Spirit.

These verses tell us with his new heart, Paul answers a call, immediately after having a vision. He changes course, setting aside what he and his companions think is the best route, and listening to the Holy Spirit, they journey in another direction. They're ready and willing to tell the Good News to a whole different group of people. Uprooted then transplanted In Philippi, they share time with Lydia and the other women (gasp!). Take a moment and see if you can imagine what the conversation may have been. The account in Acts tells us that Lydia is a worshipper of God (my research says probably not yet a convert). She and her companions were good listeners. Their hearts are open, tender as new seedlings. She and her household are Baptized. And in an act of hospitality, she invites Paul and his group to stay in her home. Maybe she had a meal of eggplant and Greek salad prepared for her guests! A better deal than camping out on the hillside and taking one's chances on “the catch of the day”!

I invite you to take a moment to consider what it might be like for you and me, in our time, if we are willing to be “transplanted”? Perhaps we'll engage with “Lydias”, ones whose faith has

already been seeded. Yet let us consider...it might be that you or I **are the Lydia**. It's possible that when humility is allowed to surface and bear its fruit, one's "soil" can be enriched.

Will we be courageous, rooted enough to withstand the temperature change, the difference in "soil", the adverse conditions that we might encounter as we venture outside of our comfort zone into another's garden?

Rather than stepping over the marginalized people around the edge of the pool, judging that they've not worked hard enough to enter the healing water, might we share our story, but more important, will we listen with an attentive heart and mind, to the story of the other? Will you and I be delighted by the variety and diversity that springs up from the Sacred Ground of mutual respect, mercy, compassion and peace?

Might we remember that God's all-encompassing love means that all His children inhabit the Garden, are invited to experience the river of the water of life, and to share in the fruits of the Tree of Life whose leaves are for the healing of nations.

Amen