

**‘The Sleeping Gardener’**

When I was reading around on the Gospel Passage we’ve just heard – I came across a piece called: **‘The Sleeping Gardner’** – with these words:

*If you are any type of workaholic or perfectionist, then you know what’s wrong with this first parable. Good gardeners don’t toss a bunch of seeds into their backyards and then snooze away the growing season. They plan, plod, and hover. They make neat little rows in well-manicured beds. They keep a wary eye on the weather. They protect their gardens from birds, rabbits, and deer. From early spring until harvest time, they water, they fertilize, they prune, they weed, and they worry.*

*But the gardener in Jesus’ parable? He sleeps. He doesn’t slog. He doesn’t micro-manage. He doesn’t second-guess. Instead, he enjoys the rest that comes from leaning into a process that is ancient, mysterious, cyclical, and sure. He trusts the seeds. He trusts the soil. He trusts the sun, the shade, the clouds, the rain. Yes, he participates in the process by planting and harvesting. He pays attention to the seasons, and gets to work when the time is ripe. But he never harbours the illusion that he’s in charge; he knows that he’s operating in a realm of mystery.*

I want to put in a reminder here – this parable is not meant to be advice to gardeners – it’s to help us learn what God’s kingdom is like ...

*In this story of the kingdom, it is not our striving, our piety, our doctrinal purity, or our impressive prayers that cause us to grow and thrive in God’s garden. It is grace alone.*

(From: [Journey with Jesus - Current Essay](#) by Debie Thomas)

The OT reading we heard has the anointing of David as King of Israel – yet it was a very long time before his reign began ... there’s still the conflict with Goliath to come, and years of leading battles and being persecuted by Saul – the current King. Things can take more time than we expect or want ... but God has not forgotten.

Back to Debie Thomas:

*In Jesus’ second parable, a sower sows a mustard seed in the ground. The joke here is not only that mustard seeds are tiny, but that the people in Jesus’s day didn’t plant mustard seeds. Mustard was a weed — and a noxious, stubborn weed at that. If a first century gardener in Palestine were foolish enough to plant it, it would quickly take over his land, dropping seeds everywhere, and breaking down all barriers of separation between itself and the other plants in the garden. Imagine a gardener today planting dandelions, or broomweed. These are commonplace nuisances we try to get rid of, not plants that most of us would ever cultivate on purpose.*

*Mustard, moreover, is not a plant that grows with any stateliness or beauty. It’s nothing like a cedar, or a giant sequoia, or even a well-tended rose bush. It grows like a weed, and it looks like one.*

*So what is Jesus saying when he describes the sacred and the holy as a tiny, insignificant mustard seed? What does it mean to take an invasive, spindly weed — a plant we’d* **PTO**

*sooner discard than sow — and make it the very heart, the very structural centre, of God's kingdom? Who and what counts in God's economy? What is beautiful? Who matters? Where do we see the sacred?*

*It's not a coincidence that the speaker of this parable — Jesus himself — comes to earth as a tiny and forgettable "mustard seed." A backwater baby born into poverty on the edges of empire. Or that the people who first follow him when he grows up are a bunch of raggedy fishermen and corrupt tax collectors. Clueless, clumsy, timid, and doubtful. Is it really the case that God's kingdom rests on folks like these? Yes. Absolutely yes.*

*Maybe, if I'm struggling to "sleep" in God's care, it's because I discount the tiny seeds. The small unfurlings. The seemingly insignificant places where the earth shifts and the "weeds" grow.*

*Here is what the kingdom of God looks like:*

- *slow, mysterious growth*
- *periods of fallowness*
- *plants we can neither control nor contain.*
- *weeds that run wild and still nourish*
- *gardeners who take naps.*

*All of this is good news, but it isn't always easy news. The truth is, it hurts to surrender my imagination and my workaholicism to God's expansive, life-changing care. It hurts to loosen my grip, to trust and accept mystery, to seek God in the commonplace, and to embrace the unwanted thing as beloved.*

*But whatever our temperaments and our circumstances, the challenge remains to scatter seed and rest in God's grace. To embrace even the weeds, and allow them to become havens of rest. Can we lean into this bizarre and laughable kingdom? Can we let go? Can we trust that the God of the inscrutable seed is also the God of the magnificent harvest? May we learn to do so.*

Maybe one or more of the lessons of Covid that God wants us to learn is connected to this passage – we're less in control than we think ... yet that doesn't mean that God has 'lost the plot' ... he will continue to work with us through difficult times

**Amen.**