



STEEPLE NEWS

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Steeple News
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Edited by Mary Mackenzie

GARDEN CONDITIONS: SOME SCRIBBLES IN SEARCH OF A MODERN PARABLE

Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23 (a sower went out to sow)
by Rev. Dan Stern

My orchard-keeping dad would never admit that he loved flowers. Colorful, variegated, sweet-smelling flowers were (with the obvious exception of apple blossoms) thought to be a bit frivolous. Yet when mom planted marigolds along the driveway rock wall, and honeysuckle on the hillside, dad was rather pleased. She was the one who had to weed, water, and tend them, but we all found the results delightful.

A strict salt and pepper kind of guy, dad never bothered with spices or medicinal herbs either. Medicinal herbs *were* the garden plants I'm told old "Doc" Stern, my great, great grandfather, most successfully cultivated. For generations they cured or provided comfort to people with various ailments. But these were judged by Doc Stern's progeny to be lacking scientific proof of effectiveness. So now, we are expected instead to buy expensive patented prescription meds, and to wait for them in long lines at corporate chain stores.

Of course, dad WAS into growing fresh fruits and some vegetables. But who has time nowadays to properly prepare the soil, to plant, water, weed, harvest, freeze, can store, and dry homemade produce? Our agribusiness-dependent, convenience-oriented, workaholic society makes this whole approach for the majority of us, at best unlikely.

It's true that "growing one's own" may seem kind of nowadays. Heck, you can BUY flowers; they're cheap in bunches. And yet for most of human history, the necessary, good, hard work of tending the soil was THE thing most people understood best. Most people were intimately acquainted with dirt. I guess I still long for that. Gardening has become my favorite Spring-Summer distraction. Granted, it's not much like the serious farming I used to know. It feels more like golfing or sailing. So if I go out in the back yard too soon in the afternoon, not having yet made a particular pastoral visit or finished some administrative task, my inherited Protestant work ethic sounds its puritanical alarm.

I'd probably feel less guilty if I was at least doing a GOOD JOB gardening! But I take one look at the rather mixed, messy and paltry results of my labor of love, and I know that even within an enclosed backyard fence, I'm not the one who's "in charge".

I do take comfort in noting that Jesus and the prophets obsessed over growing things too. Though the original metaphorical meaning of Bible farm-and-garden parables may be lost or somewhat obscure to us, they're still worth contemplating. For instance: Jesus' parable of sower and soils (Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23) seems to suggest that our Christian lives are akin to various garden conditions.

Sam and I can (sort of) identify. In our backyard, we have several distinct garden sections and soil categories: there's our rather meager vegetable zone, an overly enthusiastic, not-particularly-practical herb zone, our seldom-producing blueberries, the fast-growing, little-seed showing sunflowers and shrubs. Some thrive in south-exposed places with sunshiny faces. Some get shaded underneath their taller northerly-sloping others: the apple and shade trees. We have our soil-type subcategories too: the portion in which the previous owner had mulched and tilled for decades – that part easily produces squash and peas and such. But the part over which we more recently tore off a layer of sod and dug minimally around in rocky, clay-like soil: that part allowed beets and tomatoes to sprout out just fine, but failed to develop to maturity. There's the part of the lawn too that is thick with moss under the willow, and the part that's dandelion infested and seems averse to green-grassy consistency. Blue jays, crows, and squirrels eat spilled seed, or even seed buried too near the surface. We see the results of well-worked, nutrient-rich soil, as well as the lack of same where there is hard clay.

As Christian people, we too exist with our various 'conditions': Sometimes the good seed, lying vulnerable along
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life's wide pathway, simply gets gobbled up. The cackling crows and fat squirrels that eat the good seed might be, in our day, various competing distractions: consumerist hype, maybe; false, overly easy answers; too much willy-nilly scattered input. There may be good soil underneath us (many of us were raised in a solid Christian environment); we have great potential for faithfulness – for a life together that has richness and depth, that is not at all shallow. But if we can't protect and preserve the good seed right from the get-go, all our potential will get snatched away from us.

Some of us clearly hear God's word. The seed sprouts. We commit ourselves to the faith journey. But for one reason or another, our faith doesn't develop to maturity. The plant, in shallow soil, soon withers. To employ a more modern metaphor: wisdom's wires come across all tangled, full of static. There's so much else competing for our attention. Nothing seems to stay clear and strong.

Maybe there is no depth of soil in the first place. If, in rocky, hard-clay soil, nothing grows to full fruition, who or what's to blame? Depth and quality of soil can certainly be nourished, but that may require that we face hard realities: rocks, thick clay, consistent prayer and Bible study.

Letting our gardens do what they will 'naturally' can result in a false kind of wildness too, since most of the "wild" weeds that take over empty lots were introduced to this part of the world long ago: the tangle of aggressive, nonnative blackberries choke out the native kind, the English Ivy overwhelms the Kinikanick, delicate wildflowers can't begin to compete with the goldenrod, and so on. On the other hand, if we overly resist wildness, if we're too orderly in our gardening style, and too fertilizer-and-herbicide-dependent, time and age will overtake us. We've likely made our gardens over-dependent on us (and on our poisons and additives). Over time, we may regret it (Will monster pest species evolve and defy our lifelong, non-organic manipulations?).

I guess the definition of a garden at its best is that which brings culture and wildness, things cultivated and freely-growing, together in one place. What results are all the things that flavor and flower, color and feed our world. What gets provided to us and to the birds and bees are all the sensual and intoxicating delights of Creation.

Same thing with our lives, with our Christian faith. Something tells me it's all (STILL) happening in the (backyard, window sill, pea-patch) garden.

**FROM JOAN HENJUM
on her new appointment as pastor
to the Church of Mary Magdalene**

Grace and Peace to you! Greetings to the many supporters and friends of the Church of Mary Magdalene and Mary's Place! I

am very pleased, grateful and humbled to introduce myself as the new pastor of the Church of Mary Magdalene.

This is a powerful community – powerful in prayer, praising and grateful in worship; supportive of one another on the journey to whatever is next; and a voice in the wider community for recognition, education and justice. Not to mention celebration when our choir and speakers go out to visit churches. What a privilege to become a part of this beloved community!

I became acquainted with the Church of Mary Magdalene while I was the Director of the Food Bank in Mountlake Terrace. During that time I met Rev. Jean Kim, a member of Maplewood Presbyterian Church in Edmonds, where I was also working. I began to learn of the founding spirit of this Church—the commitment to end homelessness.

Since that time I worked with the Archdiocese Housing Authority/Catholic Community Services, St. James Cathedral and the Archdiocese Criminal Detention Ministry to open and staff the Solanus Casey Center on First Hill. The Center offers hospitality, assistance with obtaining I.D. cards, and resource connections.

The Church of Mary Magdalene is named after the first disciple whom Jesus appeared to after his death. New life was shared first with her. And Mary Magdalene was attentive, open to it, crushed by the death of her friend, but willing to let go of the past and live in the light of the resurrection. May her spirit and the grace of Jesus Christ lead us into our new future, created in community with you.

Peace & blessings, Pastor Joan

SHAREHOUSE JULY/AUGUST

July: Toothbrushes, toothpaste, floss

August: Disposable razors and laundry detergent

BIRTHDAYS JULY & AUGUST

July

Pete Thorn	7/5
Peter Kujac	7/7
Day Murti	7/14
Jeff Lundt	7/19
Frances Squaglia	7/19

August

Vernon Work	8/6
Neva Naf	8/21
Mary Linda Cook	8/22
Dan Clark	8/24

FRIEND & FORMER MEMBER PASSED AWAY **by Dan Stern**

Les Hillis passed away June 18 (obituary in last Sunday's newspaper, see below). Les worked for 50 years with an area construction company, doing work on major projects that included the 520 bridge and the viaduct. He was, at one time, a BCUCC church moderator, and quite active in adult Bible study groups. He and his wife Shirley had three children - two sons and a daughter, who still live in the area. Still alert and mentally sharp, Les died peacefully, at home with excellent hospice care - (stomach cancer-related).

If you knew Les and Shirley, it would be great if you would send a card expressing your condolences to Shirley and the family, or perhaps to give her a call. Shirley suffers from macular degeneration, so her eyesight is challenged, but seems in good spirits, and hopes to be able to remain in their home for the time being.

Shirley Hillis
10545 Dayton Ave N
Seattle, WA 98133
206-362-3474

Lester Charles Hillis - Obituary

Lester Hillis, 78, passed away peacefully at his home on June 18, 2007. He was born in Ballard on May 8th, 1929 and was the youngest of 5 children. At the ripe old age of eleven, Les started a part-time job working Saturdays at Manson Construction Co., One of his duties was sorting bolts for which Peter Manson paid him 50 cents a day and all the lunch he could eat. Les went on to proudly spend all his working life at Manson, obtaining the position of Vice President of Operations. He loved his work and all the fine people he met along the way. Lester and his wife, Shirley enjoyed their retirement years traveling in their Motor home and spending time at their beach home in Bellingham. Les loved spending time with his family and they will all miss him very much. Lester is survived by his wife, Shirley, to whom he was married for 57 years, 3 children and their spouses and 2 grandchildren: Daughter Lesley Beckley and her husband, Michael and their two sons, Alan and Todd. Sons, Charles Hillis and Shawn Hillis and his wife, Laura.

In lieu of flowers, please donate to the charity of your choice or one of Lester's favorite charities, the Humane Society. No public services are planned.

IRAQ REFLECTION:

Anger, Forgiveness and Healing **Submitted by Dan Stern**

The following unbelievably brave account of Christian non-violence in the face of kidnappers and war was submitted by Peggy Gish, a friend of Pastor Dan's who is a Church of the Brethren member and longterm worker with Christian Peacemaker Teams (CPT) in Iraq. This reflection appeared in a release from CPT on May 31; the kidnaping happened earlier

this year. Since then CPT's Iraq team has returned home for healing, examination, and discernment.

We were Sunni Muslim, Yezidi, and Christian--two Christian Peacemaker Team members, and two Kurdish Iraqi companions. We had taken a trip together to learn about and explore relationships with a community in northwest Iraq that has suffered religious persecution, poverty, and mass displacement. On our trip home, the four of us were kidnaped at gunpoint and taken to a family compound in a small village.

Our religious differences suddenly became a big deal when our guard asked each of us who we were and about the organizations we were apart of. The questions about our religion raised an extra layer of fear in our Iraqi companions. Depending on the background of our captors, their religious identity could mean life or death.

When our guard asked me if I was a Christian, I simply said, "Yes." But after he repeated the question, I sensed a veiled threat in what he asked. Then I knew I needed to say more. I wanted to be sure our guard would understand, so I asked one of my companions to translate my words.

"You are holding us here, and you would do us harm," I said, "I am a Christian, and because I am, I will forgive you!" Our guard seemed taken aback at first, and then responded defensively, "No, we will not harm you! You are like my mother."

My words about forgiveness startled me. Mixed with my fear was also anger toward these men who held us. I had no idea what they would do with us. I wanted to be able to forgive them, but I knew I wasn't there yet.

IS BOTTLED WATER BETTER? **June 2007**

Read Greentips online at
http://ucsaction.org/ct/fp_Irv71MzJd/

Bottled water manufacturers' marketing campaigns capitalize on isolated instances of contaminated public drinking water supplies by encouraging the perception that their products are purer and safer than tap water. But the reality is that tap water is actually held to more stringent quality standards than bottled water, and some brands of bottled water are just tap water in disguise. What's more, our increasing consumption of bottled water--more than 22 gallons per U.S. citizen in 2004 according to the Earth Policy Institute--fuels an unsustainable industry that takes a heavy toll on the environment.

Environmental Impact

Fossil fuel consumption. Approximately 1.5 million gallons of
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oil--enough to run 100,000 cars for a whole year--are used to make plastic water bottles, while transporting these bottles burns thousands more gallons of oil. In addition, the burning of oil and other fossil fuels (which are also used to generate the energy that powers the manufacturing process) emits global warming pollution into the atmosphere.

Water consumption. The growth in bottled water production has increased water extraction in areas near bottling plants, leading to water shortages that affect nearby consumers and farmers. In addition to the millions of gallons of water used in the plastic-making process, two gallons of water are wasted in the purification process for every gallon that goes into the bottles.

Waste. Only about 10 percent of water bottles are recycled, leaving the rest in landfills where it takes thousands of years for the plastic to decompose.

The Simple (and Cheaper) Solution

The next time you feel thirsty, forgo the bottle and turn to the tap. You'll not only lower your environmental impact but also save money--bottled water can cost up to 10,000 times more per gallon than tap water. And because the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's standards for tap water are more stringent than the Food and Drug Administration's standards for bottled water, you'll be drinking water that is just as safe as, or safer than, bottled.

If, however, you don't like the taste of your tap water or are unsure of its quality, you can buy a filter pitcher or install an inexpensive faucet filter to remove trace chemicals and bacteria. If you will be away from home, fill a reusable bottle from your tap and refill it along the way; travel bottles with built-in filters are also available. Finally, limit your bottled water purchases for those times when you're traveling in countries where water quality is questionable.

Related Links

EPA--Ground Water and Drinking Water
http://ucsaction.org/ct/f7_Irv71MzJe/

Earth Policy Institute--Bottled Water: Pouring Resources
Down the Drain http://ucsaction.org/ct/fd_Irv71MzJ3/

CommonDreams.org
http://ucsaction.org/ct/f1_Irv71MzJx/

If you received this message from a friend, you can sign up for the Union of Concerned Scientists
http://ucsaction.org/ucsaction/join.html?r=Fd_Irv71iksE&

READINGS JULY/AUGUST

July 1, 2007

5th Sunday after Pentecost

Take Up the Story

2 Kings 2:1-2, 6-14; Psalm 77:1-2, 11-20
Galatians 5:1, 13-25; Luke 9:51-62

July 8, 2007

6th Sunday after Pentecost

Unexpected Prophets

2 Kings 5:1-14; Psalm 30
Galatians 6:(1-6), 7-16; Luke 10:1-11, 16-20

July 15, 2007

7th Sunday after Pentecost

Compassionate Neighbors

Amos 7:7-17; Psalm 82
Colossians 1:1-14; Luke 10:25-37

July 22, 2007

8th Sunday after Pentecost

Faithful Listeners

Amos 8:1-12; Psalm 52
Colossians 1:15-28; Luke 10:38-42

July 29, 2007

9th Sunday after Pentecost

Prayerful Disciples

Hosea 1:2-10; Psalm 85
Colossians 2:6-15, (16-19); Luke 11:1-13

August 5, 2007

10th Sunday after Pentecost

Loving God Back

Hosea 11:1-11; Psalm 107:1-9, 43
Colossians 3:1-11; Luke 12:13-21

August 12, 2007

11th Sunday after Pentecost

Faith Is...

Isaiah 1:1, 10-20; Psalm 50:1-8, 22-23
Hebrews 11:1-3, 8-16; Luke 12:32-40

August 19, 2007

12th Sunday after Pentecost

Faith Witnesses

Isaiah 5:1-7; Psalm 80:1-2, 8-19
Hebrew 11:29-12:2; Luke 12:49-56

August 26, 2007

13th Sunday after Pentecost

Out of the Shadow

Jeremiah 1:4-10; Psalm 71:1-6
Hebrew 12:18-29; Luke 13:10-17

FORREST GUMP GOES TO HEAVEN

The day finally arrived. Forrest Gump dies and goes to Heaven. He is at the Pearly Gates, met by St. Peter himself. However, the gates are closed, and Forrest approaches the gatekeeper.

St. Peter said, "Well, Forrest, it is certainly good to see you. We have heard a lot about you I must tell you, though, that the place is filling up fast, and we have been administering an entrance examination for everyone. The test is short, but you have to pass it before you can get into Heaven."

Forrest responds, "It sure is good to be here, St. Peter, sir. But nobody ever told me about any entrance exam. I sure hope that the test ain't too hard. Life was a big enough test as it was."

St. Peter continued, "Yes, I know, Forrest, but the test is only three questions.

First: What two days of the week begin with the letter T?

Second: How many seconds are there in a year?

Third: What is God's first name?"

Forrest leaves to think the questions over. He returns the next day and sees St. Peter, who waves him up, and says, "Now that you have had a chance to think the questions over, tell me your answers"

Forrest replied, "Well, the first one— which two days in the week begins with the letter "T"? Shucks, that one is easy. That would be Today and Tomorrow." *

The Saint's eyes opened wide and he exclaimed, "Forrest, that is not what I was thinking, but you do have a point, and I guess I did not specify, so I will give you credit for that answer. How about the next one?" asked St. Peter.

"How many seconds in a year? Now that one is harder," replied Forrest, "but I think and think about that, and I guess the only answer can be twelve."

Astounded, St. Peter said, "Twelve? Twelve? Forrest, how in Heaven's name could you come up with twelve seconds in a year?"

Forrest replied, "Shucks, there's got to be twelve: January 2nd, February 2nd, March 2nd..."

"Hold it," interrupts St. Peter. "I see where you are going with this, and I see your point, though that was not quite what I had in mind....but I will have to give you credit for that one, too. Let us go on with the third and final question. Can you tell me God's first name"?

"Sure," Forrest replied, "It's Andy."

"Andy?" exclaimed an exasperated and frustrated St Peter. "Ok, I can understand how you came up with your answers to my first two questions, but just how in the world did you come up with the name Andy as the first name of God?"

"Shucks, that was the easiest one of all," Forrest replied. "I learnt it from the song, "ANDY WALKS WITH ME, ANDY TALKS WITH ME, ANDY TELLS ME I AM HIS OWN."

St. Peter opened the Pearly Gates, and said: "Run Forrest, run."

Give me a sense of humor, Lord. Give me the ability to understand a clean joke, to get some humor out of life, and to pass it on to other folks.

NOTES FROM HOLLIS BREDEWIG

Acting Pacific NW UCC Conference Minister

How difficult it is for those of us inside an organization to think like outsiders, or to remember that others don't know as much about us as we assume everybody must know. Every so often I come across someone who has no idea that the Pacific Northwest Conference is functioning pretty well right now, that we have finished the last two calendar years in the black, that we are helping financially support Little Farms UCC in Louisiana to the tune of \$25,000 per year, and that at the same time we have increased the percentage of Our Church's Wider Mission (OCWM) that is forwarded to the national denomination. All this is true, but perhaps not as commonly known as I would like to assume. So, enough assumptions! I would like to take the opportunity to write just a little about where we are right now.

Over the next six months I will be serving as the Acting Conference Minister, splitting time between my current duties on the east side of the Conference and responsibilities in the Seattle office and west side. Helping me bear the load are Gail Crouch and Paul Forman, who will be staffing the search process will selected congregations, providing staffing for some Conference leadership committees, and in general trying to keep me out of trouble. In addition to Paul and Gail, Jim Dyson, a retired Disciples of Christ pastor and member of Shalom UCC, Richland, may be utilized to assist with work on the east side of the Conference.

In the Seattle office, Arlene Hobson continues her dedicated and effective service as Executive Administrator, and bookkeeper Deirdre Stevenson is working hard to aid us in finishing the transition from our former accounting system to QuickBooks Pro.

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The church camping season is now getting underway, with wonderful opportunities for all ages at our fabulous camps, N-Sid-Sen and Pilgrim Firs. Many other UCC Conferences across the nation struggle with their camps, which lose money and strain the finances of the Conference. Not so here! Both N-Sid-Sen and Pilgrim Firs are operating in the black, thanks to the great work of managers Randy Crowe and Deeg Nelson. More information about this summer's camps can be found at the conference website: www.pncucc.org.

While the staff continues serving on behalf of our churches, the Conference Minister Search Committee is working hard to identify and call our next Conference Minister. As the application period has now closed, the Search Committee met on June 30 to discuss the profiles they have received and read, making a first reduction in the number of candidates to be considered. Throughout July and August they will continue to engage candidates, bringing several to Seattle for face-to-face interviews in late August. A candidate will be presented to the Board of Directors on September 15, and to a special meeting of the Conference on October 20. We anticipate our new Conference Minister being in place by the first day of January 2008.

All of this wonderful activity is overseen by our Conference Board of Directors:

Moderator: Rev. Steve Eriksen, Shalom UCC, Richland
Vice-Moderator: Ms. Karyn Frazier, Northshore UCC,
Woodinville
Scribe: Ms. Kaila Russell, Tolt UCC, Carnation
Treasurer: Rev. Paul Forman, Northshore UCC, Woodinville
(retired)
Personnel Chair: Rev. Dr. Joanne Carlson Brown, United
Church in University Place
Youth Representative: Mr. Jesse Colman, United Christian
Church, Yakima
DOC Representative: Rev. Eric Don Anderson, United
Christian Church, Yakima
Central West: Mr. Bing Tso, Bethany UCC, Seattle

Contact information for these Conference leaders is available in the Conference Directory (the updated version will be completed soon) and at the Conference website.

Know that there is a lot happening in the Pacific Northwest Conference of the United Church of Christ, and that these are exciting days! I'm glad to be along for the ride!

