

A Few Thoughts for the Hunkered Down

Thursday, November 12, 2020

Learning Faith and Hope from My New Tree

I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth. So neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth. The one who plants and the one who waters have a common purpose, and each will receive wages according to the labor of each. For we are God's servants, working together; you are God's field, God's building. —1 Corinthians 3:6-9

My newly planted tree is teaching me some lessons in faith and hope. This is not a completely new lesson, as I have been through this challenge before, but it has taken on a much richer meaning in the season of the virus. It began with a dead tree in my backyard. It had been dying by degrees for years and we were glad to replace it. After a little thought and a few shopping trips, Kay and I decided upon the right tree, stuffed this nine-foot beauty in my little Honda, took it home and planted it. Though it has been a while, I remembered a few of the helpful tips for planting a tree. I did remember that fall is a good time for planting and I bought the kind of mulch that one is supposed to mix into the soil to help with root growth. The tree has been supported with guy ropes to keep any strong winds from doing it damage, and I also have been soaking it with a several hour slow trickle of water once a week as the month after its planting it was rather dry. Then came the hard part.

Now I wait. It will only be in the spring that I know just how well the tree is doing. There are high hopes for beautiful new foliage and noticeable growth as is common to a young tree, but for now I can only wait. For some reason most of my previous tree plantings happened in the early spring, so it was not long before I knew where things stood. This one has been planted in the fall, and not only do I have to wait six months to know how things are going, but in the meantime, it is looking a little beaten! Plants usually look a bit frail after the ride home and the shock of transplanting, and this tree is no exception. I look at the withering, falling leaves and ask, "Is that the color they are supposed to turn, and should they be dropping that early?" Is the tree thriving or deteriorating? I will not know until the spring, and that seems a long way off. There is the temptation to pour Miracle Gro or some kind of fertilizer on it, but this is more likely to burn the roots of a transplant than to help it. I just have to wait. This is not a new experience as all gardening involves waiting. We do our part, and the rest is up to the Lord. We plant seeds and wait for the sprout. We arrange our garden patch and wait for the fruit. Faith and hope are required, but this should not be so hard as we consider God's faithfulness.

Throughout this COVID shutdown and semi-quarantine it feels as though the Church has been taken from us. It is as though the Church, like my new tree, has entered a semi-dormant state. We cannot gather fully and function as the lively fellowship that we were so recently. It is easy to become discouraged and to lose faith. Not that we stand by helplessly! We pray, we gather as we can, we do digital as best we know how, and we adapt our ministries as we are able, but it doesn't look or feel the same, for it is truly not the same. We await the spring, beyond this season of the virus.

What will the spring present us? Will it be a diminished and worn congregation, battle wearied and tired? We pray that it will be a renewed fellowship, strengthened by a time of testing and more deeply rooted in our faith? Paul spoke of his missionary calling as a work of planting, and he spoke of various jobs involved in that farming endeavor. Paul planted and Apollos watered. Paul wanted to demonstrate to the Corinthians that each has differing tasks to perform and skills to use in Christ's Church. Beyond this lesson he was emphasizing the supernatural nature of the Church. It is a work of God. God has given us His Son, and God is growing the Church of Jesus Christ. God is doing a mighty work in His Church and we await the coming spring to see that work revealed. In the meantime, with hearts full of faith and hope, we wait.

Blessings,

Pastor Jim

O God, who never forsakes those that hope in thee: grant that we may ever keep that hope which thou hast given us by thy Word as an anchor of our souls, to preserve us sure and steadfast, unshaken and secure in all the storms of life; through Jesus Christ our Lord. —Source Unknown