

“Waiting is Active”

Mark 4:26-34

The Rev. Joanna Samuelson
Designated Minister

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From the Pulpit

The First Congregational Church, United Church of Christ
444 East Broad Street, Columbus, OH 43215

Phone: 614.228.1741 Fax: 614.461.1741

Email: home@first-church.org

Website: <http://www.first-church.org>

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Let us pray: O Holy One, speak to us now and touch us through Your Word for us this day; and O Dear God, may the words that I have to offer, here, this morning, please You and honor You and glorify Your Holy Name. In Jesus’ name, we pray, amen.

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I want to begin this morning by asking all of you a couple of questions:

How many of you have a green thumb?

And any gardeners or farmers among us?

During the past two years since I have been here, with all of you, at First Church, I have learned that several of you are seasoned gardeners and that many of you **just enjoy** being outdoors and doing yardwork and planting flowers and getting your hands dirty in the soil.

It feels good, doesn’t it?! Even therapeutic, at times. Would you agree?

In fact, many of you often volunteer your precious time, here, at church:

- to cut the shrubs back,
- and pull the weeds,
- and plant flowers on our grounds.

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Now, I don’t know if this may come as a bit of a surprise to you, but I am *not* much of a gardener!

And, for several years, *our* backyard at home was not even **suitable** for a garden because it truly was our kids' playground and **athletic** field!

It was where they learned how to play soccer and baseball and football and frisbee.

It was where the neighborhood kids and friends played tag **and** played on our swing set.

Our backyard was also where **our** kids made up their own games and competitions.

One year, all the kids planned a backyard World Cup soccer series for the neighborhood. It was so much fun!

And, the backyard was where our children laughed and cried – at times – and learned how to work out their differences.

Well, our family, as you may know, is now in a **very** different stage of life.

Our older three children are now young adults and have left the nest – *for the most part*.

And so, about a year ago, our youngest two (who many of you know), Henry and Malcolm, helped us to *finally* disassemble that old swing set that no one used anymore.

And so, to mark that *significant transition* in the life of our family, Shane and I decided that it was *finally* time to plant a garden ... **BUT** we certainly weren't overly-confident about our gardening skills and so, we started (small) with a 3 x 4 foot raised garden box.

And guess what was the first thing to grow in our new garden (last year)?

Bunnies! Yes, bunnies!

A mama rabbit apparently thought that our garden box looked like a safe and cozy place to give birth to her four baby bunnies!

And she was absolutely right!

And it remained their home until the bunnies were all ready and strong enough to go out and into the world on their own.

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This year, just recently, Shane planted some tomato plants and strawberries in our garden box – and *already* – we are witnessing the gradual transformation ... the flowering and the budding of *both* plants. It is such an exciting and encouraging and hopeful time to watch our plants develop and grow and thrive.

As many of you know from personal experience, gardening is *certainly* a very intentional and patient and developmental and disciplined process that simply *cannot* be rushed.

But we **are** hopeful and eager to see this ripening and blooming process through ... because we are anticipating that the sweetness – and the goodness – of our new plants will be well worth the wait!

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In our Gospel reading from Mark 4 this morning, Jesus offers us not one, but **TWO**, gardening parables to help us understand something about the nature and attributes of the Kin-dom of God.

And whether we are *botanists* or *master gardeners* or *beginners*, gardening is literally a *down-to-earth* spiritual metaphor that is practical and relatable.

And so, here, in our text for today, we are given a timeless metaphor, one that has held deep spiritual truth and meaning throughout the ages and for us today.

In the first parable in our reading today (verses 26-29 of chapter 4), Jesus stresses that even though the farmer is the one who planted the seeds in the ground, he actually has little to do with its growing or flourishing.

Jesus explains that:

“the earth produces of itself,
first the stalk and then, the head,
and then the *full grain* in the head”

The farmer may have scattered the seeds and later harvested the plant, but it was during that *in between time* that *the growth* and *the flourishing* actually happened.

And then, if *that's* not clear enough, Jesus offered his followers a *second* lesson --- the well-known parable about the mustard seed. And he emphasizes that the mustard seed is the **smallest** of seeds and yet, when it is planted in the ground, it becomes the greatest of all shrubs -- with branches so large -- that the birds are able to make their nests in its shade.

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During the past couple of weeks, as I have been reflecting on this familiar text from Mark for today, I have been reminded that:

- gardening is, indeed, a patient process
- and that growth and maturation cannot be rushed.

Now, this sounds rather basic and obvious when it comes to plant life, doesn't it?

But in the context of our everyday lives -- and in our life together as First Church, that's not always easy to practice! In fact, I wonder if many of us may be naturally impatient at certain times or maybe socialized to be that way. (I know that I am!)

If there is a need, we want an immediate response.

If there is a problem, we want a solution. (We want to fix it a.s.a.p!)

If there is some anxiety in any area of our lives, we seek comfort and calm, and long for control.

And yet, Jesus reminds us through his gardening parables, that we are often called **to wait** –that maturation and healthy and meaningful growth cannot be rushed.

However, in our reading for today, I don't hear Jesus suggesting to his followers – that they are to be passive until the time of harvesting.

Rather, I believe Jesus is teaching his disciples then – and all of us today – **to be patient and prayerful and discerning and faithful and hopeful** in times of waiting and anxiety and restlessness. And in that way, waiting becomes intentional. And waiting becomes active. And waiting even becomes life-giving.

Similar to the time from planting to harvesting, we, too, are called to wait at different times in our lives. And so, in that way, **waiting becomes** a spiritual practice.

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And so, I ask you: *When, in your lives, has it been difficult for you to wait?*

Perhaps you know what it is like to have waited *several* days for your doctor's office to call you back with critical lab results.

Or maybe you recall a time when you thought you had nailed a job interview, but it took the prospective employer weeks to get back to you!

Or, in today's world, it certainly can feel like an eternity to have to go without your cell phone for **even one day** if it needs to be repaired or replaced!

And, as this consequential presidential election year unfolds, it can be anxiety-provoking and stressful, at times, to have to wait until November to see how it will all turn out!

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You may have heard me mention before – that one of my favorite authors and spiritual teachers is the late Henri Nouwen.

And so, I'd like to close this morning with some of his words of wisdom about waiting from his best-selling book, *The Wounded Healer*:

1. *To wait with openness and trust is an enormously radical attitude toward life.*
2. *It is choosing to hope that something is happening for us that is far beyond our own imaginings.*
3. *It is living with the conviction that God molds us in love, holds us in tenderness, and moves us away from the sources of our fear.*
4. *And, it is giving up control over our future and letting God define and lead and shape our lives.*

As we move deeper into the year of:

- developmental changes in the seasons of our personal lives;
- and this chapter of significant transition within our congregation;
- and this time of profound consequence for our nation –

may we do so, grounded in faith, open to growth, and nurtured and sustained through community, that each one of us would grow and flourish and thrive – with hope for today and for tomorrow!

Thanks be to God!

Amen!

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