

“Grandchildren are the crown of the elderly.” Or as a friend once said, “The success of parenting isn’t realized until the delight of grandchildren.” This cultivating is the essence of humanity’s ability to thrive in our world today! So, how are you doing?

Tuesday

I used to walk through a beautiful forest a few times a week. I was always amazed at the enormity of the oaks that towered to the sky. Each fall, they would turn from a vibrant green to a brilliant red. The leaves would fall to the earth while scattering their seeds. Over time, the leaves would decompose, releasing nutrients into the soil to invigorate the seeds. By spring, new saplings would emerge and start their climb towards the heavens like the parents did before.

Cultivation in the church is an act of a people who continue nurturing the soils in order for the new sprouts to emerge. That is why a multi-generational church is vital to well-being—we need the blessings and seeds from previous generations to fall and nurture the newest generations. The seeds need space to emerge and grow so they too may one day tower and continue this cycle.

In the Old Testament, there is a belief that each generation passes on to the next, not only our story but also, our blessings. They are instructed to keep telling the story of God’s work among them so every generation would begin seeing the ancient story as their own (read Deuteronomy 6:20-25). Have you ever thought about how you are cultivating the soils at CUC? Within your family? What nutrients are you

helping to work into the soil of possibilities?

Wednesday

Jesus tells a parable about manure. In Luke 13:6-9, he says,

A man owned a fig tree planted in his vineyard. He came looking for fruit on it and found none. He said to his gardener, ‘Look, I’ve come looking for fruit on this fig tree for the past three years, and I’ve never found any. Cut it down! Why should it continue depleting the soil’s nutrients?’ The gardener responded, ‘Lord, give it one more year, and I will dig around it and give it fertilizer (manure). Maybe it will produce fruit next year; if not, then you can cut it down.’

The thing about manure is that it is slow in impact. It slowly breaks down and returns its nutrients to the earth. It isn’t the quick fix like chopping something down certainly is. Instead, it needs time to work and reveal its work. The spiritual life is not a quick dash; instead it is a marathon where there are moments of sprinting and moments of walking.

To cultivate the soil is to create the space and time for the spirit to work. It is to bear the slowness with patience; to see the ‘junk’ tree and believe that it can bear fruit. To allow the manure to work, one must be willing to trust in the unknown, for it is time that will reveal whether the tree just needed nutrients or was in fact dead.

In our lives, do we see that we are all a work in progress? Do we see that we need God tilling the soil around us and working in the manure that will give us the necessary nutrients to grow? Yes, the

spiritual life is a gradual transformation that doesn’t happen in a moment but is a work in progress.

Thursday

The first time I started a garden I grew tomatoes. I was newly married and thought it would be great to grow a vegetable that my wife loved. I dug a few holes, put the plants into the hole and then recovered them with the displaced dirt. I figured a few weeks later they would abound with big, red juicy tomatoes. I sat back and waited...nothing happened. I began watering them and though the plant grew, few fruit developed. By season end, little had grown that was edible and I was rejected.

Year two came with more plants, but better instructions. My father-in-law shared with me the need to prepare the soil by tilling it, adding manure, and ensuring the soil was moist. Then, after all that work was done, plant the small seedlings. Again, they grew big but had much more fruit. They were big but still not prolific in fruitfulness. He shared his next piece of advice...hit the stalks with a broom, break a couple of branches and keep watering.

Amazingly, the plants exploded with tomatoes. I asked him why that was and in his quiet wisdom he shared with me that the soil needed to be cultivated with nutrients that would give the plant energy and life. The water ensured the plant could survive. And the beating of the plant made it uncomfortable (shock) which created new growth.

Though simple, this is quite true for us as individuals and as a people. The soil must

be cultivated with nutrients and loosening of the soil in order for anything new to emerge. We need the Spirit stirring us and preparing us to be ready to grow. Water is the life-line that ensures we have the continual pouring in so we can absorb life. And all of us need rough patches that force us to find new ways to grow. Cultivation is a gift that leads to a fruitful life!

Friday

In our lives, we need those who cultivate within us a place to grow. The first people most often are parents. Later in life they can be friends or mentors. These people see what can be within us before we are even aware of it within ourselves. They nurture us to strive to become more than we currently are and often have words of love that may not always feel loving. Yet their intent is the key. Have you had these people in your life? What did you gain by their cultivating?

One community that Paul founded a church in was a city called Corinth. They were an eager bunch but were continually fighting among themselves. Paul writes a series of letters to them in the hope of cultivating something truer and healthier. Read 1 Corinthians 3:1-9.

Those were words to motivate...to help them grow up! They couldn't handle the deeper stuff because they were still debating the mundane and silly. To create an environment in which to cultivate vision and impact, we must always shift our attention away from the juvenile, and invite others to go deeper. We are a people on a mission with God, and for God, but it is really all about God! The mature realize

that we just play a part in the grander story of God among us, in which the star is never 'me'. May the Spirit cultivate the soil of our collective and individual lives so we may blossom with life!

Saturday

To continue the legacy is to cultivate the soil of the future. We are a part of a community who has passed on a rich heritage, which invites us to continue to cultivate the soils of our time. In days gone by, they cultivated the soil of equity in wages; they cultivated the soil of reproduction by starting churches; they cultivated the soil of equality by welcoming ALL.

We hope that we are cultivating the soil that leads to a people who 'Embody Christ!' We hope we hear the words from the letter to Colossians and absorb it into ourselves—

“Your life is hidden with Christ in God.”

Or, as Meister Eckhart once said,

“The eye through which I see God is the same eye through which God sees me; my eye and God's eye are one eye, one seeing, one knowing, one love.”

In this season of our life together, what is the Spirit cultivating now? Are we seeing as God sees? How might we be instruments in God's very hands to bring love and wholeness to a broken world? How might the Spirit use you with all your gifts to be a blessing to another?

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CUC's 3 C's: Part 3 - Cultivate

Devotional for the week of
October 9, 2017

Monday

The church is less an organization as it is an organism. It is alive, and forever adjusting to its environment. It isn't a static, never-changing entity. Instead, it expands and contracts; awakes and sleeps; grows and changes. Last week, we rediscovered our values that help us to continue our DNA in order that we are true to our identity. This is good! These base level values are the soil that is used to cultivate the new growth of opportunities.

We have explored our need to **Celebrate**; the importance to **Continue** our legacy; and now we explore the power of cultivating the soils for this day, while eyeing the future that lies before us. This week we will explore the imagery of **Cultivation**. To cultivate is to prepare or to develop. It is to prepare the space for new life to emerge, along with the trees that are maturing already.

That is the wonder of a grandparent/grandchild relationship. They are unique in part due to the contrast marked by the spectrum of life. One is now in the business of giving wisdom and cultivating understanding through stories, laughter and a freer engagement with the child. A child is the soil that needs nurturing and imparting the values and ideals that have come from generations before. Proverbs 17:6 wisely says,

