

Planting and Trusting
Preacher: Rev. Lauren Lorincz
Date: November 18, 2012

12:48

There's a story I enjoy from my two childhood friends Frog and Toad by Arnold Lobel about planting a garden. One day Frog was out working in his garden and Toad stopped by to comment on how beautiful it was, wishing that he had a garden. Frog said, "Here are some flower seeds. Plant them in the ground and soon you will have a garden." Toad happily accepted this present and went home, planting his seeds.

"Now seeds," Toad said, "Start growing." But nothing happened. Toad got closer to the ground, "Now seeds, start growing!" Still no sign of progress. The third time, Toad was on the ground and shouted; "NOW SEEDS, START GROWING!" Frog came running, asking what all the shouting was about. Toad complained that his seeds would not seem to grow, so Frog mused that maybe the seeds were afraid. Frog advised, "Leave them alone for a few days. Let the sun shine on them, let the rain fall on them. Soon your seeds will start to grow."

But Toad took matters into his own hands. Figuring his seeds must be afraid of the dark, he read to them by candlelight that evening. The next day, he sang them songs. He read poems and played music—still no growth. Toad said, "These must be the most frightened seeds in the whole world!" and fell asleep. Frog woke him up to show him the great news—green little plants were coming up out of the ground! All that fretting was over nothing, the seeds became little green plants anyway.[1]

Toad could have used a little bit of sloth in our story, or at least patience and perspective. It takes a rather controlling individual to think that you can single handedly make seeds grow in this way. Now getting into our sixth Deadly Sin of Sloth today, it's worth noting that sloth just seems misguided (like thinking you can read seeds a bedtime story and expect freshly planted seeds to instantly grow into flowers), but sloth seems like nothing to worry about. After all, with gluttony you could eat yourself to death, with greed and lust you can do some real damage to yourself and others, go take a drive and you realize that excessive anger can lead to accidents, and showing how much misguided pride you have by listing off your resume at dinner parties will probably not win you many friends.

These Deadly Sins we've covered so far are damaging in one way or another to ourselves and those around us. Sloth seems lame in comparison, except it's not. Robin Meyers argues that sloth has two components. There is the Latin root *acedia*, which means a lack of caring or an aimless indifference toward responsibilities to God and humanity and there's the root *tristitia*, which means sadness or sorrow.[2] People can unfortunately become sloth-like for these two reasons—a feeling of indifference or sorrow that makes them shut down to the world around them. Apathy is probably one of the worst societal sins of our time. If you go through life numb to what you see, unfeeling in general, and staying on the surface level, that doesn't seem healthy.

It reminds me of an incident that happened five years ago in a Washington DC Metro Station as reported by the Washington Post. A violinist in a baseball hat and everyday clothes stationed himself next to a trash can in a metro station and played six classical pieces at 8 AM on a Friday morning. He is world-renowned violinist Joshua Bell, who three days before this experiment played at Symphony Hall here in Boston where decent tickets to see him were \$100 each.

Bell played six pieces on his famous \$3.5 million violin once owned by Austrian composer Fritz Kreisler. Of the 1,097 people who walked by him for the 43 minutes he played, only seven people stopped to listen to his performance for at least a minute. "Twenty-seven gave money, most of them on the run—for a total of \$32 and change. That leaves the 1,070 people who hurried by, oblivious, many only three feet away, few even turning to look." George Weingarten, who wrote about this experiment ended by saying, "If we can't take the time out of our lives to stay a moment and listen to one of the best musicians on Earth play some of the best music ever written; if the surge of modern life so overpowers us that we are deaf and blind to something like that—then what else are we missing?"[3]

Sloth is so much more than lying around being lazy, eating bon-bons, and watching Netflix all day. It means this level of indifference to the world around us. It means that we're probably missing a lot if we're living our lives in our own bubble. It means that can we get stuck in our own sorrow and we miss the beauty all around us.

In a more troubling form, the great preacher Fred Craddock describes sloth like this, "It's the ability to look at a starving child, curled up in front of a store window with a swollen stomach and say, 'Well, it's not my kid.' To look at a recent widow, huddled under a gray shawl and peering out at a gray world, and say, 'It's not my mom.' Or see an old man sitting alone among the pigeons in the park and say, 'Well, that's not my dad.' It is that capacity of the human spirit to look out upon the world and everything God made and say, I DON'T CARE."[4]

So what do we do with the Deadly Sin of Sloth? I think that we take our cue from Jesus' parable this morning—we plant seeds, we trust, we live into the mystery, and we stand back and watch love grow.

You'll see that Jesus compares the kingdom of God to this man who casts seeds in the ground. The man sleeps; rises night and day, and the seeds grow, even though he can't explain exactly how. The earth produces. The seed finds a way to become first a stalk, then a head, then grain appears in the head, and finally there is ripe grain. Unlike Toad reading his seeds a bedtime story and singing songs, the man is able to step back and watch growth happen even if he doesn't quite understand how it's happening.

Because the virtue that comes out of the Deadly Sin of Sloth is Contentment, it's the gift of knowing when to step back and enjoy what you've done, be grateful for what you have, and live into the simple gifts of life. This parable of the Seed Growing Secretly is found only in the Gospel of Mark. There's debate about who Jesus directed this parable toward, but Biblical interpreters agree that this parable means that the Kingdom of God, inaugurated by God, is coming into being in spite of any human effort to bring it about or oppose it.[5]

This is most likely realized eschatology at its finest—meaning that the time of Jesus' reign is here on earth now. Maybe we shouldn't be so focused on Jesus coming back to save us all, maybe the time is ripe for us to start reaping and working to enact his example of love of God and love of neighbor in our communities now. But we have to do so knowing that there is some mystery here and there are things at work way beyond our control. We have to be content with this knowledge that God's ways are not our ways, and God's time is not our time. As Martin Luther once said, "The kingdom of God comes of itself without our prayer, but we pray in this petition that it may also come to us."[6]

Personally, this whole being content and trusting thing is hard for me—I want to be like Toad. I want to sing a song, recite a poem, read a story by candlelight and experience instant growth in membership, increased pledges, higher church attendance, more commitment to the Christian faith, real Biblical literacy in mainline congregations, and yet my song and dance can't make these things happen on my own. I'm a terrible dancer anyway; you can ask anyone who

traveled to Zambia with me. As Robin Meyers says when he reflects on this passage, none of us can solely carry the burden of trying to save the world.[7]

So we plant seeds, we trust, we live into the mystery, and we stand back and watch love grow. I can't do it alone, our staff can't do it alone, our Moderator can't do it alone, our Church Council can't do it alone, our Committees can't do it alone. Here at Pilgrim Church, we need the entire congregation to plant these seeds. We need to all tend this garden. We need to all bring in the harvest when the time is ripe, trusting that God is helping us along the way to make this happen. We need to have a community garden here at Pilgrim Church that we all pull up our sleeves and work in together.

I trust that we are all pledging today and supporting our church financially so that we can plant our seeds and watch them grow now and into the future. And as much as living into the mystery can be scary, we have to trust in the One whose purpose is greater than our own. I'm excited to tend our garden together, and I trust that you are too. May it be so. Amen.

[1] Arnold Lobel, *Adventures of Frog and Toad*, "The Garden."

[2] Robin Meyers, *The Virtue in the Vice: Finding Seven Lively Virtues in the Seven Deadly Sins*, 175.

[3] George Weingarten, "Pearls Before Breakfast," in the *Washington Post*, Sunday April 8, 2007, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2007/04/04/AR2007040401721.html>

[4] Fred Craddock, as quoted by Robin Meyers *The Virtue in the Vice: Finding Seven Lively Virtues in the Seven Deadly Sins*, 175.

[5] Arland J. Hultgren, *The Parables of Jesus: A Commentary*, 388.

[6] Martin Luther, as quoted by Arland J. Hultgren, *The Parables of Jesus: A Commentary*, 390.

[7] Robin Meyers, *The Virtue in the Vice: Finding Seven Lively Virtues in the Seven Deadly Sins*, 187.