



INTRO TO THEME

It's not easy being a gardener!!

I just want to bring faith alive.

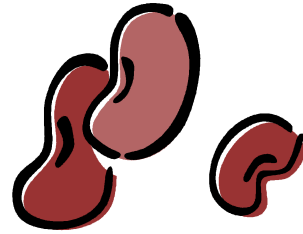
Grow some bean seeds and give everyone a bean seedling.

So I teed up Caz and bought some soil, containers and seeds

Simple...bean in pot, plenty of time...will grow.

Hadn't counted on beans being so difficult...people Kent and Jack...Richard changed his mind...the beans disintegrated, or didn't germinate...the weather went down to 5 degrees...

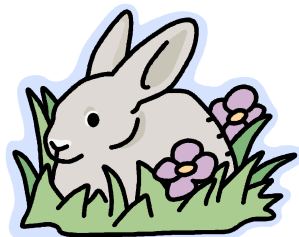
I wanted to give everyone a tangible reminder of what it means to be **growing great community** today. But what I discovered was that it takes quite a lot of intentionality, persistence and nurture to get there. My plan got derailed! But my desire is still there. I have some offerings here...in various states of growing!! I think it's a great metaphor for our community and what I want us to explore further today.



WHAT DO GARDENS NEED?

1. gardens need preparation and insight... knowledge, a plan.
2. It needs the sowing of seeds and the planting of plants...that's what gardens are for
3. They need cultivation and hard work...
4. The garden needs ongoing fertilising, watering...
5. The garden needs weeding, pruning, cutting back rampant growth, training
6. It needs protection from pests of all sorts...

WHAT SORTS OF garden busters ARE out OUT THERE?



WHAT DOES COMMUNITY NEED?

1. VISION, values of beauty or functionality, having fresh organic produce to eat, saving money, generosity...
2. Corporate aims and goals, a sense of forward progress. Actions
3. willingness, intentionality
4. perseverance, long term commitment
5. to be in the vine a willingness to be pruned and led by Christ.
6. skills to guard against community busters

It needs to be intentionally nurtured and looked after, persisted with and looked out for with an overall vision as we move from a small church to a large church.

GROWING GREAT COMMUNITY

Stories

My father was a gardener. He liked to grow veges, prided himself on taming the hard, volcanic clay of our Auckland property, defending himself against marauding cats and presenting with pride the latest crop that he had harvested to my mother. It was man against the earth.

My aunt on the other hand was among other things a botanist and prided herself on growing trees and flowers...the beautiful parts of a garden. And everytime I visited her, I would trail around after her admiring the flowers and come home with little cottage garden posies. We played games there, I climbed trees and I learned the names of the plants. I realise looking back that I found a lot of peace there. It was the companionship of my two maiden aunts in that garden that saved me from a silent and lonely childhood. I actually think these women represented Christ to me in a way that as a child I didn't understand but to me now is a great comfort as I look for where God was present to me.

More recently as a mother with 3 young children, I found that in depression one of the best things I could do was go to the garden and work with the soil and plant plants and look after them. And as I did this fundamentally basic task I taught myself to be grounded in what it means to be human and to picture God working with the very base soil of my life as I put Him in the central core growing matrix as first, Lord, foundation, strength.

There's something hugely therapeutic about the garden.

Human life began in the earth. From adamah was adam created. We are of the earth. It grounds us.

In the garden there is peace and therapy, the joy of seeing things grow and produce fruit and flowers. We get to participate in creation.

In the Garden the Lord God is present to us. When we think about growing great community the image of the garden is a particularly apt one; communities need all that gardens do and more.

In John 15: 1 Jesus is the true vine and His Father is the Gardener. We are the branches. This image is a communal one. It teaches us a lot about community.

1. The God we know and worship lives in community. Let us make humans in our image. In love and grace Yahweh opened up that trinity and created other. Us. I think foundationally we are made to be in community with God and with each other.

2. This passage teaches us that we are to be in the vine, in Christ cos on our own because we can't survive detached and going it alone. This is the basic Christian message...that we need to God's help to live this life rightly. If you are not part of this vine—grafted in as one of the branches you really need to be. If we are not we find even God opposes us.

V 1 says Jesus is the **true vine** as opposed to the wild, unruly vine that Israel became.

- **Isaiah 5: 7** The vineyard of the Lord Almighty is the house of Israel, and the men of Judah are the garden of his delight. And he looked for justice, but saw bloodshed and for righteousness, but heard cries of distress. **God** took away its hedge of protection and it became a wasteland, neither pruned nor cultivated, with no rain. It yielded only bad fruit.
- **John 15: 2** He cuts off every branch in the vine i.e. in Christ **that bears no fruit.** And prunes the others so they will bear more fruit.

What we notice about this is that it is God that does this work. He's the gardener and he's tending his garden. This involves some ruthless chopping out!

- So firstly God lives in community and opens this up to us.
- And second we are to be in relationship to Jesus Christ in this vine/vineyard where God is the Gardener. BUT WHAT IS THE POINT?

Being in Christ has a point: **to bear fruit.**

V5 If you remain in me you will bear much fruit. This is repeated in this passage over and over.

This is to my Father's glory that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.

V 8

John 15: 16 I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit, fruit that will last and so that whatever you ask in my name the father will give you. .

This is both individually and communally .

Fruitfulness is the end product of what we do in community with Christ and each other.

NOW WE ARE IN THE BUSINESS OF GROWING GREAT COMMUNITY

So I wonder : What sort of fruit is He looking for??

Fruit is the product of God's work in us. Fruitfulness is firstly rooted in personal relationship with Jesus and this is maintained by living by his word and obeying and abiding.

In Galatians the spirit energized nature produces inner qualities of peace, joy and love which are expressed in outward relationships characterised by gentleness, self control and patience.

The fruitfulness God seeks is expressed in righteous and loving acts that bring peace and harmony to individuals and society.

True community is created when:

- we love
- Lay down our lives for our friends
- In acts of kindness, hospitality and generosity
- In justice and righteousness

I have used the metaphor of the garden to illustrate community today.

What does the garden of our great community look like?

How are we growing it, nurturing it, extending it????

Vision

Your vision is what you can see. It may not exist yet but you can still see it. Our vision is what we can see our church community being like with God's help.

Faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see. Heb 11:1

Vision and faith are closely connected, both are active not static.

A vision may be an ideal towards which you are moving.

My vision was to have nice bean plants for everyone!! I thought I had all the right ingredients. However I am determined to keep at it, to make better beans next time, to keep being creative and pushing you guy a bit with that. I have a passionate vision for the church and the kingdom of God and the part that we communally play in that. And things will slowly change!! Like the seed in the sketch we will have to be willing to move out of our comfort zones a little and do some hard work of planning and being aware of what things are community busters and what just keeps us doing the same old thing, year after year.

We have a vision!

Growing great community is an ideal we are looking towards.

But there is real value in visualising the goal and knowing what you want it to be like.

Our unpacking of our vision for community will reflect our values. The things we consider to be really important both to retain and guard and to aspire to and grow into.

Brainstorm:

1. What does community at Leith Valley church look like at the moment?

What are the things we value about the Leith Valley church community?

2. As we move from a small church to a larger one, what will *great community* look like?

What will we retain and guard and how?

3. The goal of community is fruitfulness and the growth of the Kingdom of God.

How will we intentionally develop and grow our community?

