

2020-08-16 Weeding and Watering

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artisanchurch.com

[Music Intro]

[Male voice] The following is a presentation of Artisan Church in Rochester, New York.

[Voice of Pastor Scott]

Thank you, Doug, for that reading. And you are already picking up what I'm laying down with using those texts and thinking about rain. And so I want to ask you a question, and those of you who are here with me on Zoom – a couple times in the next few minutes I'm going to ask you to type something into the chat. So if you're willing to do that I'd love to have that interaction with you in this way. And the Facebook Live community can have their own little kind of community with that as well. You can type your answers in there, just know that I won't be able to see them right now. But I wonder, how many of you are growing something in a garden this summer? You don't have to type that particular one but maybe you can just like, wave your hand or raise your hand if you're growing something in a garden this summer. I can see a couple people saying that they are, and we do have some really serious, great gardeners here at Artisan. I'm not one of them, but we have many who are. In fact, our next fireside chat, which I was hoping to get posted before today but I just didn't have time to edit, is from Angela Glading, who's a member of our Leadership Team. She has an utterly magnificent garden. If you've ever been to the Glading house you have probably seen it. But you're going to get to see that in the fireside chat this week.

So, what is your favorite thing that you're growing, if you're growing something? Go ahead and type in the chat your favorite thing that you're growing this summer in your garden, or in a pot or wherever. And maybe if you aren't doing anything maybe just type in what's your favorite thing to eat right off the vine. [reading responses] I see blueberries, lavender... oh wow, cherry tomatoes. I'm also growing some cherry tomatoes, or trying to, anyway. They're in pots out front. Basil... Colleen's excited for a new hydrangea bush, that's wonderful. Grass (that's good, grass planted finally), tomatoes, "my father in law's heirlooms we have been growing for five years." Thank you for that James, I love it. The answers are coming in fast now. Snap peas. I'm not a pea eater but snap peas right off the right off the vine are really good. (Do they grow on vines? I'm demonstrating my ignorance of agriculture.) Blackberries, tomatoes, and

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herbs. Another vote for hydrangea, more tomatoes. A lot of people grow tomatoes. I love fresh tomatoes; there's nothing quite like it. ZZ says marigolds, oh beautiful! I have to come by and see those. More raspberries. Oh, snapdragons; I used to love snapdragons when I was a kid.

All right, well, it looks like a lot of you are growing stuff and I'm really excited to hear that; that's wonderful. Now, as I said, I am not a gardener but I like the idea of gardening. I have been growing those tomatoes in pots this summer and that's been kind of fun, but here's the reason why I'm not a gardener. The reason I'm not a gardener is that I lack the particular variety of patience that's required of a good gardener. And what I mean by that is that I love the beginning part and the end part of a garden, but everything in between is not pleasant enough to keep my attention [laughs]. And sometimes it's actually unpleasant, right? So when I imagine the idea of planting something, that seems very hopeful. It's full of possibilities. Nothing bad has happened yet. It's very exciting and there's something, like, tangible and physical about picking a seed or a little shoot or sapling and planting it in the earth. I love that part of it.

And when I imagine the act of harvesting – especially a fruit or a vegetable, but it's also true of flowers, in a different way – I think that seems wonderful, too. You can see and touch and maybe even taste the result of the growth. You're finally getting your reward – sustenance, or maybe it's beauty. And it's totally measurable. I mean, you could say, “We got 22 tomatoes off this cherry tomato plant this summer,” or whatever. You could say, “The pink roses finally blossomed this year for the first time.” So, I love the beginning and I love the end, but almost everything in between just feels like frustration and futility to me.

Now, I realize that some people love all parts of gardening. I'm not saying you're wrong, I'm just speaking my own truth here today. For me, there is not enough reward in between the planting and the harvesting to keep my attention. So I was thinking about that this week and sort of trying to maybe apply it to the life that we're all living right now. Doesn't it just feel some days like we're waiting and waiting for some future that we are hopeful about, that we think will be better than today in some way or another? But we don't know what it is exactly, and more importantly perhaps, we don't know *when* it will be. And if you don't know what is coming and you don't know when it's coming, you can easily descend into hopelessness.

That's why I think it's so important and it's such a gift that we have these little gems scattered throughout the Bible where we receive encouragement to wait with hope. And because of the fact that so much of scripture was written in an agrarian society, an agricultural world, a lot of the figurative language that the authors of scripture use is based on farming. It's about plants; it's about planting and harvesting and weeding and watering.

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So, you heard the verse from the prophet Hosea that said that God's appearing will come to us like the spring rains that water in the earth, which gives us the image of waiting through a long winter. That's something that we know a little bit about here in Rochester, isn't it? When it's finally spring rain, we are ready and we've been waiting. And we heard those verses from James the apostle who compared waiting for the return of Jesus to a farmer who waits for the precious crop from the earth, being patient with it until it receives the early and the late rains. Now, I used that verse as a reflection in our service several weeks ago, but it's continued to stick with me, so I'm using it again. And the reason I want to use it again is because it really gets at the idea of – not the waiting through the winter, which is its own kind of thing, but the waiting between the act of planting and the act of harvesting, especially in a season of apparent drought, where there is no rain. So there's early rains and there's late rains, and you can imagine a season where there is no rain in between. I think that's what James is really pointing toward in these verses that we read today. And it's that idea that I want us to think about for just a few minutes.

Think about a season when there's no rain. What does a gardener have to do when there are days or even weeks on end with no rain? You don't have to type this into the chat, because I know you know the answer. What a farmer or a gardener has to do in a season where there's no rain is they have to *water the plants*. By the way, here's another reason why I'm not good at growing things: Remembering to do something every single day or every other day is not my strong suit. So, if we imagine ourselves as being in a time of drought – which I don't think it's very difficult for us to imagine, even though, at least in Rochester outdoors today, it is a little damp – our world feels like it's in a season of drought.

I'd like you to tell me in that chat: What are some of the things that you are doing during this season to water your soul? Or maybe if you're not really doing very much, what are some of the things you know you should be doing right now, that you know would be good for yourself if you would do them? How are you watering the dry soil of your spirit in this season? Tell us in the chat because it would be really good for others to know. They might need that.

[reading responses] Going to work every day. Those who can are thankful to do that. Biking and running outside many times a week, yeah. Slow walks with music that moves me, therapy, taking time to explore the outdoors, talks with good friends. ZZ says crafting, that's a really good one. Lots of walks with family. Ah, Denise says planting a garden – what a great example! Reading and listening to podcasts to keep learning, another vote for reading, another vote for getting outside. Doug says getting up and getting out of bed, even without a scheduled event,

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mmhmm. Bike rides, spending time alone. Del says weekly prayer, checking in with friends, and hanging out with Mark and the girls. Yeah, family. Playing games with friends and family. Susan says listening to the Bible on the way to work. What a bunch of great suggestions here; keep them coming. I may have to stop reading them at a certain point. Walking daily and social-distanced walks with friends; being out-of-doors. Reading Mary Oliver poems – if you don't read Mary Oliver poems, wow, they are wonderful! Tending a garden. [chuckles] Ellen points out very gently that weeding and watering can be therapeutic for some of us. Yes, if you don't have the same character defects that I have, you may be better equipped for that. Connecting with family and friends. Ken says that Chris walks and talks with family and friends on the phone. You remember talking on the phone? I had a phone conversation last night, actually. And by the way, I don't know if this will embarrass them, but I want to publicly say happy 50th wedding anniversary to Paul and LeAnn Nelson. Their anniversary was yesterday, yeah. I don't have many rules in life, but when we're in the middle of a pandemic and someone has a 50th wedding anniversary, I call them on the phone; that's one of my few rules. [chuckles]

So, a quick observation: For many of us, watering the plants is not necessarily fun. And I mean that both literally, but also figuratively, because we're obviously using this as a metaphor for self care right now. Whatever the things that you do to kind of water the plants of your soul, that might not be fun; it might seem like a chore. You might be frustrated that there's not really much evidence that it's *doing* anything, right? When you, especially if you plant a seed in a pot and you're watering it day after day after day and nothing is happening, you might start to think, “You know what, I probably don't even need to do this; it's obviously not doing anything.” It can be easy to forget to water the plants. So, I would encourage you – especially those of you who have some of these self-care, soul-watering kind of things that you know work for you, but you haven't been doing – I would encourage you to put some system in place in your life that will remind you to do this.

Now, I know it doesn't seem very spiritual to say, like, “Hey telephone, remind me to water the plants every Tuesday and Thursday at 9 a.m.,” right? But whatever that is for you, it could be as simple as putting a reminder in your phone. It's very tempting sometimes to avoid – for me anyway, again, maybe it's a character flaw – but it's very tempting to avoid these simple practical helps and guides in my spiritual life, that if I just would set it up and get a reminder, you know, at a certain time to do something, more often than not would probably do it. So that's watering.

Here's something else we might think about during a season of drought: What is the one category of plant that always seems to be able to grow when there has been no rain? You know

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what I'm talking about – it's the weeds! I'm seeing somebody is signing the spelling for weeds. Yes! Weeds seem to have this ability to grow in dry, cracked soil when nothing that we actually *want* to come up will come up, the weeds will still come up. And whether you love gardening or not, I have to guess that everybody would say that weeding is the least fun part of gardening. If you love weeding, I want to hear from you (if you love weeding for more than ten minutes, especially), but I think most folks would agree that weeding a garden is not the most fun part about gardening. And so again, what does this mean for our spiritual lives?

I wonder, this one might be a little bit more personal, but maybe you'd be willing to type into the chat: What are some of the weeds that are cropping up in your life during this season of drought? Those unwanted appearances that seem to come up all the time. And you'd like to get rid of them, because you know they're not what you want. [reading responses] Anxiety; the unknown. Hmm. No control over my job; I really miss my students. Yeah, I know a lot of teachers who really miss their students. Frustrations; the need to be right – that's a weed that is cropping up for some people now, yep; I would count myself among them. Aggravation. Wasting time on YouTube. hmm. Low energy, exhaustion, isolation and loneliness. The temptation to forego doing something for myself every day. Missing touch and hugging. Yeah.

Someone messaged me privately to say depression and anxiety, yeah. I think even people who wouldn't consider themselves depressed or having been diagnosed with depression are experiencing that in this time. I'd encourage you to watch out for that and to get the right type of help for that, and don't be afraid or ashamed to reach out to a therapist if you're experiencing depression at a depth that you haven't before, or for the first time. There is nothing ungodly about getting counseling or getting medication for that, and it may be that you need to do something a little extra during this time.

Other weeds that are cropping up: Not being really present with family even though we're together; wow, that's very insightful, Jessie. Bob says discouragement. Losing focus during the workday, yeah. Oh, yeah, that's a good reminder, Ken, to reach out to the Artisan group, too. Lots of folks at Artisan have kind of traveled that path of depression and anxiety at a deeper level than you might have, before these times, and so they can be a good resource. Thank you, Ken. Well, thank you for being willing to share some of the some of the ways you water your soul, and for being willing to share especially some of the weeds that are cropping up. I want you to know how powerful that is for people, to see and hear from their siblings in Christ that they're not alone in the ways that their life is kind of going right now. You have given such a gift to each other in being willing to share those parts of your life.

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Let me make one quick observation about weeding: It's not always the right thing to do to yank the weed out of the earth the second it appears. Jesus has some interesting things to say about this; you can look up for yourself the parable of the wheat and the tares. But I would say this: if your soil is particularly tender right now, if the seeds or the shoots that you have been planting in your life are particularly fragile right now, it may be too destructive to be very aggressive with the weeds in your life. And that seems counterintuitive; it seems like if something's going wrong or sideways and you can do anything to stop it, you know that you should just do that, and we kind of grasp toward these corrective things sometimes. And it's not that it's bad to do that – if you feel like you can and should do that right now, I encourage to do it – but it might be that the right thing to do right now is simply to acknowledge what's going on, and to pay attention to it, and to make sure it's not driving the bus, if I can just mix metaphors here on the fly. That weed that's cropping up in your life, as long as it's not controlling your life, the thing to do might be to just note it and observe it and wait a little while to make a big change.

And maybe even remember this, that even weeds are a sign of life. If there are weeds growing, you know that the soil isn't completely dead; you know that there is hope that someday something else might grow, and I'll tell you this: I can promise you that something *is growing* right now in you, and you might not be able to see it or be aware of it yet. It might be that all you can see is dry, cracked soil and these annoying weeds that keep cropping up through it, but there are seeds of beauty and truth and goodness that have been planted in you and are growing in you, and in us. And when the time comes, we will be able to harvest that, or to enjoy it. We'll be able to eat the fruit; we'll be able to see the beautiful flower. That time is not now yet, but it's coming. And I think that's what these scripture verses are so good at reminding us of.

And so, my prayer for you is that you continue to water your spirit in the ways that you know God has given you to take care of yourself, and that you would have the wisdom to know when those weeds crop up, “Is this something that I need to trim away or pull up right this minute, or is this one of those weeds that if I pull it now, I might be up rooting my seeds of goodness, too?” Have the wisdom in the power of the Spirit to know if this weed is one that you might just let grow up a little bit and observe.

Amen.

[End of sermon]

[Male voice] For more information, visit us at ArtisanChurch.com.