

It's all about gardens, isn't it?' Gardens and vineyards. When you think about the biblical story, so much of it takes place – in gardens and vineyards.

It all starts in a garden, where God creates a paradise and calls it Eden - which translates as pleasure or delight- and says to Adam and Eve “I have created a place for you to live. A garden – it has everything you need. It is a place where we can walk together. Take care of the garden. But that tree over there – well, be sure to leave it alone”. Well you know that rest of the story. And so it begins

Adam and Eve take the bite, and end up outside looking in

Abraham and Sara are living in another veritable garden - Ur of Chaldea – a lush area of the Tigris and Euphrates rivers, when they get itchy feet and spend the rest of their lives journeying through deserts to get to another sort of garden - a land described as full of milk and honey. Their destination is Canaan, which becomes their homeland.

Joseph arrives on the scene when his people and becomes the saviour of his family by bringing them to the fertile gardens of Egypt.

Four hundred years later during the time of Moses, the Hebrew people have found that their paradise is now a prison, and they take up the chant – let my people go. Again they exchange the garden for a desert, and after 40 years wandering in the desert, the Hebrew people find themselves back in Canaan – the Land of Promise.

David sings of the wonders of God's grace in images of tending the land or shepherding the sheep. Elijah teaches King Ahaz about Gods justice in Naboth's vineyard.

The prophets are rife with images of gardens and fields and vineyards.

Jesus picks up on these same images to teach in parables about grace and justice - lost sheep and farmers and seed and weeds and greed - about the coming Kingdom of God.

As we consider these stories, we need to consider that we are the people of the vineyard, the garden, the farmers in the field. We are the Children of God called to care for creation, which too often we have taken as a licence to do what we want , without consideration of the consequences for creation.

We have failed as keepers of the vineyard or shepherds of the flocks when it comes to the creation around us. We have trashed and tarnished creation by forgetting that we too are part of its intricate web and that when we destroy and threaten creation. We are desecrating our home.

The effects of global warming are being felt all around the world. Polar ice is thawing – sea levels are rising. Coral reefs are drowning. Storms are on average 20% more powerful than what they were 40 years ago. We despoil God's creation by smoke stacks and auto emissions. We poison the earth with heavy metals and radioactive waste. We have created over 100,000 chemicals since the 2nd world war and have put them into circulation. Not having a clue what the long term impact will be on the air, the land or the water.

Giant corporations are turning Africa and parts of Brazil into deserts by clear-cutting areas the size of Prince Edward Island every year because the governments there are unable to negotiate or enforce environmental standards.

Pristine rivers and entire watersheds are being destroyed in Africa, Asia and Russia by mining companies too greedy to pay for responsible environmental cleanup like they would have to in Canada or Europe

We have trashed God's garden.

But there are things we can do. First, we have to acknowledge that we are all in this together. This isn't a war where there are winners and losers. If we lose this war – we all lose.

In Europe there is a movement to recreate what was lost when people moved to cities – Community. And those communities are centered around new models of care taking the earth: creating gardens that provide healthy foods without chemicals, using creative ways to increase yields by returning to rotation and interspersing of crops, providing safe places for bees and butterflies and birds.

But the first thing they have to do is to listen to each other and to creation, and they have to acknowledge that they are all in this together. And one of the fascinating things that is happening is that as people learn to listen to one another, and to spend time taking care of the earth, they find that their anxiety and fears ease and they are more at one with themselves, with the earth and with each other.

The Gospel story comes to its culmination in 2 garden scenes: the Garden of Gethsemane where Jesus is betrayed, denied and abandoned, and the garden of the tomb where he is buried. But where he breaks free is on Easter's dawn, as the first-born of a new creation. And here it is fascinating that Mary – when she meets Jesus, who does she mistake him for but a gardener.

“Go and tell them - those who will believe - that I am with you. I go before you to Galilee, and to the ends of creation”

The end of the story is not really the end, but rather a new beginning, a new creation. Perhaps we too can do our part in this new creation here and now by continuing our commitment to be a greener congregation. Over these past few years after much time

and many failures we have finally got the city to include our church and churches like ours in their blue and grey box programs. And over the summer we have been in conversations with them on expanding the green box program to include churches. On that front, we need to keep attentive to what can recycle and in what format and what we can't - not only when we decide in front of the garbage and recycle bins, but also when we are making purchases.

We have invested in solar panels, reducing the carbon foot print by the equivalent of a forest of acres and acres of trees. We have gone to energy efficient lights in a good part of the building. We have put energy efficient windows in the sanctuary and the hall – we still have the entryway and courtyard to go. We put programmable thermostats throughout the building. We have been in conversation with our neighbours about hosting a community garden on our site. And we have made a lot of progress. But we still have a ways to go before a pilot project. Hopefully next year.

Other ideas have been suggested: A fair trade sales table featuring coffee, tea, and chocolates. Community cleanup days. Install bike racks – perhaps shaped as crosses, and dozens of other ideas

When Jesus first called the disciples, He initiated a time of transformation in their personal lives, but also in the lives of others. A transformation that spread across the roman empire and around the world

The calls goes out today for us as children of the earth, to answer the call to work together to transform creation, to bring hope and life and abundance to all God's people.