

See how the flowers of the field grow...

Part 4: GROWING

In summer, two contrasting forces are at work. On the one hand, there is the desire which comes with warm weather to take things more slowly, to be at ease, and this is good, and welcome. But in the natural world, summer is a growing season. The sun is at its strongest, and plants are reaching out towards it, seizing the long hours of sunlight. Flowers bloom. Fruit swells and ripens. Young animals and birds are growing fast, building their strength before winter comes.

As I write this, the fields near my house are full of wheat. It's a bright, dusty green, but the ears are tall and strong, pushing towards the light. It won't be long before these fields are turning from green to gold. Then the harvesting machines will be working day and night to bring the crops in safely.

The cycle of seedtime, growth and harvest is a reminder that, like everything else on the earth, we can't escape being rooted in time. Summer is a glorious season, but it passes quickly. The grasses in the field today will tomorrow be thrown into the fire. *Carpe Diem*. Seize the day. Rather than be anxious about the passing of time, we might ask how best to live in this season of life, how not to miss its gifts and opportunities.

I invite you into a time of being still. Take a few minutes to feel present, to be in this moment which is unlike any other moment, in this day, in this season of your life. Being aware of your surroundings, the room you are in, the chair you are sitting in, and what's immediately beyond, if there's a window, what that looks on to, the things that locate me in this moment in time, in my life.

Pay attention to your breathing, the quiet rhythm of it. Without changing, notice the breath being drawn into the lungs, and breathed out. Noticing where you might feel that in the body, in the nose or mouth, or in slight movements of the chest or rib cage. Without changing anything too much, take a deeper breath, and breathe out, and then another, using that to deepen the sense of stillness in you.

As you sit in stillness, you might consider where in your life there is a sense of movement, a sense of something new happening, or something old shifting, a sense of something dynamic or unfinished. Is there in that a sense of invitation, being invited to something more than you currently have? All of these are signs of growth.

What is growing in me, like the plants reaching towards the sun?

PAUSE

These verses are from Paul's first letter to the Corinthians.

(1 Corinthians 3: 6-9)

I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God has been making it grow. So neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but only God, who makes things grow. The one who plants and the one who waters have one purpose, and they will each be rewarded according to their own labour. For we are fellow workers in God's service; you are God's field, God's building.

Paul begins this passage by trying to address the divisions which arise when groups of people within the church follow different leaders. It's not about following Paul, or following Apollos, he says, we're all God's servants. But then he goes on to say something much bigger: God makes all things grow. And you are God's field.

We might take a little time to consider those words, "you are God's field". What does this metaphor have to show us?

Perhaps we are not growing in isolation but together, as a community.

Perhaps this field is nothing like as uniform as a field of wheat. There is room for diversity, creativity, like a garden, or a field of wild flowers.

Perhaps what God is growing, tending in me is not one thing but many things.

Perhaps God's work in me is dynamic and changing and adapting to circumstances like weather.

Margaret Silf describes the "godseed" in each of us, that tiny piece of the immanent God, which will start growing when we are touched by the God who is transcendent, beyond us. She writes: "There, the transcendent God who 'touched' us will join the immanent God locked up, like a seed in our hearts, and something new will grow from that union. The flower (or plant or bush or tree!) will be the unique manifestation (or incarnation) of God that is ours, and ours alone, to bring forth. If we do not bring it to birth, it will not come to birth... It is God's dream for us."

Shifting the metaphor slightly, Henri Nouwen writes that as we grow in prayer we will begin to experience "the freedom to stroll through your inner yard and to rake up the leaves and clear the paths so you can easily find the way to your heart..."

And he goes on: "With this new confidence, we recapture our own lives afresh from within. Along with the new knowledge of our 'inner space' where feelings of love and hatred, tenderness and pain, forgiveness and greed are separated, strengthened, or reformed, there emerges the mastery of the gentle hand. This is the hand of the gardener who carefully makes space for a new plant to grow and who doesn't pull weeds too rashly, but uproots only those which threaten to choke the new life."

Am I aware of the gentle hand of the gardener in my life?

Perhaps I have a choice - I can resist that process, or choose to cooperate with it.

What kind of flower - or plant or bush or tree - do I hope will grow in me?

MUSIC