

+ Rose (Pastor Jeremy Walloch + 7 March 2010 + Luke 13:1-9)

**A**t that very time there were some present who told him about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices. He asked them, “Do you think that because these Galileans suffered in this way they were worse sinners than all other Galileans? No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all perish as they did. Or those eighteen who were killed when the tower of Siloam fell on them—do you think that they were worse offenders than all the others living in Jerusalem? No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all perish just as they did.” Then he told this parable: “A man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard; and he came looking for fruit on it and found none. So he said to the gardener, ‘See here! For three years I have come looking for fruit on this fig tree, and still I find none. Cut it down! Why should it be wasting the soil?’ He replied, ‘Sir, let it alone for one more year, until I dig around it and put manure on it. If it bears fruit next year, well and good; but if not, you can cut it down.’”

When I told people I was going to do a four-day long silent monastic retreat, the most common response I got was: “Aren’t you going to go insane?” Well, I did complete the four days in silence, and am grateful for the restoring opportunity, but I have to admit that in those four days I may have actually gone a little insane.

See, I was walking outside after mass and lunch enjoying the beautiful grounds, with stunning trees, flourishing shrubs, and lots of flowers that looked quite a bit like roses. The sidewalks there don’t run directly from building to building, but are all winding, with the Stations of the Cross along the way, so that those walking along in flowing brown monastic robes or sharp black clerical collars can’t even walk the grounds quickly, but must patiently walk the path of Jesus’ suffering. It’s amazing. Periodically along the path there are white marble benches to sit and rest and pray with life-like statues, fresh-cut flowers, and burning candles.

And while I was ambling along I happened upon the groundskeeper’s little golf cart. The back was loaded up with bags of fertilizer, rakes, and seeds, and on the bench was an old binder clearly labeled: Landscaping Instructions. Well, I don’t really know much of anything about gardening, and the Mrs. has been trying to get me into it, and my curiosity got the best of me, so after glancing around to make sure nobody was near, I picked up the binder and started leafing through the gardener’s notes.

I’m not sure how long I was reading, I guess I lost track of time, but eventually I got jolted out of my silence by a loud exclamation right behind me: “Woe is me!” I quickly dropped the binder back into the golf cart and turned around, but I didn’t see anybody. I started guiltily slinking away, thinking that too much silence finally got the best of me, but then I heard it again, “Woe is me!”, yet this time I noticed a little plant shaking while the words were said.

So I crouched down by the sprout and broke my silence to awkwardly say, “Um, excuse me, plant, but were you talking?”

“More like weeping,” the plant retorted.

“Oh, I’m sorry,” I said, “but I’ve never heard a plant speak before.”

“Well, if anyone has a reason to speak, it’s me,” the plant hinted.

“Ok, I’ll bite,” I said, “What’s wrong?”

“Can’t you see the horrible situation I’m in? It’s cold and dirty and dark and I’m covered in manure.”

“Really?,” I skeptically exclaimed. “You don’t like it here? This place is gorgeous. And all you have to do is be what you were created to be.”

“There’s nothing gorgeous about being covered in old cow poop,” the plant harshly snapped.

So I clocked back in and made my first attempt at pastoral care for a plant. “I don’t really know much about gardening,” I started, “but in the gardener’s binder it said that plants periodically need manure to make them stronger and to help them grow. The gardener really wants the best for you, and doesn’t want you covered in that stuff, but it’s the only situation that produces growth. Too much sunshine and you’ll just wilt and wither and perish.”

“The gardener doesn’t know a thing,” the plant retorted. “Look at that weed next to me, it’s only got two arms and it has thorns on the top. It’s *obviously* a weed, but he keeps showing it off to everyone, bragging about it, and telling them that stupid story about the time another groundskeeper cut it down, but how it grew right back. Stupid weed,” the plant concluded.

“Um, I don’t think that’s a weed,” I responded, “I actually think it’s a flower. It might even be a...”

“Don’t you think I know the difference between a flower and a weed? It’s obvious. Flowers are never prickly, there’s always just soft. Besides, you just said that all you know about gardening is from reading a binder.”

“Yeah,” I started, “all I know I got out of that binder, but you are a plant. Plants aren’t capable of telling the difference between a flower and a weed. You’re just a plant, not the gardener.”

“Well, I guess we’ll just have to wait and see,” the plant stubbornly concluded.

And just then, the thorny plant next to it bloomed a perfect rose bud.

“See,” I said, “sometimes a filthy situation produces a rose.”

So I resumed my walk, and as I did I came upon the gardener, or the gardener came upon me.

“Excuse me,” I said, “I know I’m not supposed to be talking, but there’s a plant back there by the rose and it was talking to me.”

“Yeah,” the gardener said with a grandfatherly grin.

“Don’t you need to pull it so it doesn’t take resources away from the rose and ruin it?” I asked, trying to sound all smart.

“We’ll just wait and see,” the gardener replied with a wink, “you just never know when they might come around.”

May you who are planted here and awaiting the gardener’s return, find patience with those who surround you, growth through dirty situations, inspiration from the risen Christ, strength from the gardener’s instructions, and trust in your caretaker. Amen.