

SUMMER 2021
ISSUE NO. 18

CARING FOR THE LAND

T **THE**
TABLE
ORDINARY TIME

Letter from the Editor

SOMETIMES, I CAN'T HELP BUT RESENT MY HUMANITY. For all the time it takes to self improve--diet, exercise, counseling, growth in spirituality and social awareness--it takes no time at all for the old ugliness to come out again: one moment of belligerence from one of my children or the arrival of an unexpected hardship. Try as I might, I can never eradicate the old self--or at least, it goes much deeper than I ever dared imagine.

For one reason or another, this rumination was at the forefront of my mind when I first poured over the content of this magazine. In considering the topic of creation care, we collected a number of personal and varied reflections from people who have found themselves immersed in some kind of natural cultivation. As I read their stories, it occurred to me that in their own way, each of these contributors is doing what I have described above: they are grappling with nature.

The natural world reflects the human story: the outer world revealing truth to us about the inner world. This is why we find ourselves drawn to nature, whether we are hikers, kayakers, sunset-watchers, or all of the above. And perhaps this is why so many of us have gotten the "gardening bug." As you'll see in these stories, when we get into the dirt and wrestle with compost and roots, weeds and bees, humidity and sunshine (that is to say, all of it from the ground up), we often find ourselves in a simultaneous inner wrestling match.

"Why did God create poison ivy?" is a question I often get from my kids. Or "Why did God create flies/mosquitoes/squash beetles [insert nuisance of choice here]?" I wonder these things myself, and have no answer for them save for wondering aloud if all the unpleasant, unloved, or undignified parts of the natural world exist to uniquely reflect back to us the story of ourselves. It is hard for me to see the point of poison ivy,

to which I am extremely allergic and inevitably exposed. But these annoyances are a part of the mystery of the rhythm and balance of nature and mirror the rhythm and balance of our humanity. I am also a conglomeration of beauty and ugliness, of gentleness and sting, of antidote and poison. The contradiction of my Self is terrifying and disorienting sometimes. To see this inner drama played out in the natural world gives me a broad and assuring perspective of the purposeful ordering of creation and the loving intent of its architect. In short: if there can be a purpose (at the very least, redemptive purpose) for mosquitoes, perhaps the same can apply for whatever nagging, persisting sin I can't seem to get out from under my skin.

In the past, I have mostly thought of the lessons we learn through nature as random, accidental comparisons. But especially after reading the stories within these pages--glimpses into homes and hearts where spiritual education from nature is anything but happenstance--I see that they are divinely intentional and ever present. They exist around us at all times and in very personal ways. The natural world is both the setting of and a mirror to the story of humanity: where it came from and why, how it works and what its purpose is, what its future will be. If we will sit within it and pay attention, it is teeming with wisdom and with comfort for our lives. This beautiful tandem existence provides overwhelming evidence of the spiritual mystery of God's affection and presence with humanity.

The human story is so complex, so nuanced, that it takes all of us to live it and reveal its intricacies to one another. Contained in these pages are the stories of a community of people who are digging into the literal and metaphorical richness of nature and holding up their discoveries--little pieces, heavy with significance--to nourish our spirits with hopeful truths as bright as blooms.

**With Joy,
Laura Fissel
Managing Editor**

ABOUT THE ART

Cover Art, Title "Creation of the Sunkiss"
by Greensboro artist Tamra Hunt

"My work looks at the conversation of the physical world within the framed square, the abstract space, and the landscape of the canvas. I am interested in evoking a visceral experience that creates a language of symbols which speak through color, forms, and materiality. In this, creating a sense of harmony and juxtaposition in a relationship that concentrates on the manifestation of the physical material of paint. Mostly, I want the viewer to look, to see, to feel, and to experience their own interpretation and find meaning within my paintings.

"Creation of the Sunkiss" is a painting about artistic self-expression, exploration, and growth. I am interested in the physicality of the abstract image: the back and forth play between form, color, space, and light. I approached this work through

the process of free-flow, spontaneous action of pouring paint directly onto the canvas. As I moved the paint around the edges of the canvas, I got a sense of where the poured paint would go and then stop. This action is much like free-style dancing: a physical movement that requires a sense of improvisation. The improvisation of making "Creation of the Sunkiss" gave me an awareness of freedom, which allowed me to immerse myself fully in the painting as I connected to the Spirit of God. Much like praying, I listened to my intuition that guided my process to select the monochromatic orange color, the directional pours, and the tangibility of a "light" source created through particular colors and media. This work is symbolic of God's love, joy, grace, and mercy for his creation and all living creatures that exist today."

Tamra Hunt is a native of Greensboro and a member of the American Indian tribe Lumbee of NC.

THE TABLE

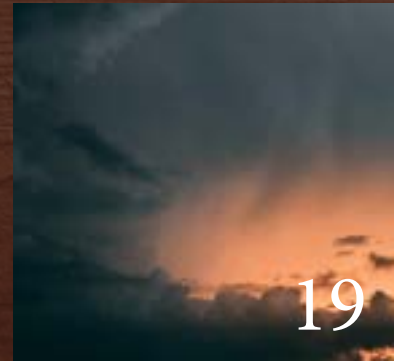
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The GREEN Good News

Jesus' call to the garden—to a positive, joyful vision of earthly life—is too often obscured by our tendency to separate material, social, and spiritual domains. Jesus' teachings and actions are commonly taken to be only spiritual or symbolic. For example, my sister was recently reading the Gospel of Mark with her son and she asked me: "Bread keeps coming up. What do you think that symbolizes?" To which I responded, "This is one I can answer. The bread is about...bread. He is really concerned with feeding people." Now on a certain level, my sister is right, and my answer is obnoxious (a right I reserve as the eternal little brother). There is more at stake than just referencing single and specific loaves of bread from two thousand years ago. If that is all the story was about it would be quite stale. But, because of our habits of reading past the material and the social, it is worth underlining the importance of the incarnational, earthly stakes of scripture.

Along these lines, though many Christians recite the Lord's Prayer weekly, if not daily, its material and agrarian petitions seem to have been lost. This is a prayer that asks for God's kingdom to come, for the Lord's will to be done "on earth as it is in heaven." It petitions for our daily bread and the forgiveness of debts (Matt 6:9–12). It is the prayer of a peasant Jesus for peasants that calls for the restoration of the covenant between God, neighbors, and land. While this has spiritual consequences, it also calls for the incarnation of material and social change—that everyone be fed and that debts be released. Jesus is the Christ, anointed for the task of overturning the table of values and the extractive economy of the Empire that has left the people poor and the land stripped.

Jesus' constant appeals to agrarian life are often interpreted as illustrations used to reach the Palestinian peasants to whom he was speaking. The real message is, on this reading, concerned with higher matters. From this it follows that when teaching in a different context one can discard the flowery images of the land for other more relevant metaphors. When Jesus sets out to teach the crowds and the disciples about the kingdom it is no accident that he constantly refers to different ways in which people care for or exploit the land. In so doing, he weaves together the material, the social, and the spiritual.

For example, in chapter 13 of Matthew, Jesus repeatedly speaks of the kingdom of God in botanical images rooted deeply in the field and the garden. He begins the series speaking of a sower who

goes out and casts seed on different surfaces. Jesus tells a gathered crowd about a sower, who threw seeds over parts of the field that have been tread over, but birds came and devoured and consumed them. The sower cast some other seeds on a thin layer of earth just above rock. The seeds sprang up quickly but had "no depth of soil." When the sun rose, it scorched that earth and "they withered away." Still other seeds fell among thorns, and, even after being ploughed, the thorns grew back and choked them. But some seed was cast "on good earth and brought forth grain, some a hundred-fold, some sixty, some thirty" (Matt 13:3–9).

Far from being an earthly story with a heavenly meaning, the parable was directed toward the political and economic situation of Jesus' hearers. The closest analogue to Jesus' little stories in our culture would be a political cartoon, in which an exaggerated fiction is drawn to lay bare a truth that is covered over by what we take to be real. For instance, while an image of politicians in bed with oil executives might not be the most factual representation of the relationships that dictate policy in our time, it would be truer than video footage of one criticizing the other.

In this story, Jesus points to the abundance of the land and the violence of political and cultural obstacles. Whereas a Palestinian farmer might expect anywhere from a four to eleven-fold return from his seed, the good land without obstacles in Jesus' story yields grain ten times greater. This image reminds hearers that the gift of God's land is one that should provide abundantly. But the violent verbs of the forces that inhibit this growth—of birds that devour, fire that scorches the earth, and weeds that choke—lead hearers to think about what really produces scarcity in the villages. The peasant, then, is left to draw the connection that God's land provides abundantly, but it is the violent ways of the elite that truly consume the harvest, leave their land barren, and choke out their community. The laborers know that while they may work fruitfully in the fields, the extractive economy of the Empire has led to scarcity and destruction in their villages. This simple story allows Jesus to say this in public, and it allows peasants to make connections that are obscured by the ruling order.

...

The parable's implied critique overturns the ways of the wealthy that want to render everything unto Caesar and trust that wealth produces abundance. The parable also points to a different domain

of values: the Kingdom of God and the abundance of God's good earth. In the Empire the rich get richer. But in God's kingdom, those who cultivate the good earth and value the relationships of the covenant, will find that there is more than enough for all. Jesus undermines the Empire's gospel of prosperity with the good news of the kingdom of God where the poor and the hungry will be given more and live in blessed community.

To his disciples—Christ's followers who take up his ministry and his forms of organizing—Jesus gave a further interpretation of the parable that underlines the social and spiritual obstacles along the path to the kingdom. Here the parable doubles to illustrate how our social and work relationships, the demands of our households, and the status symbols that we cling to for our identity will make the radical change required to follow Christ profoundly difficult. Jesus explains that the seed that falls on the path and is devoured by the birds is like the good news given to someone whose heart is deeply shaped by the powers of the Empire: they will simply not be able to understand. The seed that is sown on rocky ground, that springs up quickly, will be like those who might hastily move toward transformation, but at the first sign of conflict with the norms and powers of the world, they will go back to their old ways. The seed that is choked out by the thorns are those who hear the good news, "but the cares of the world and the lure of wealth choke the word, and it yields nothing" (Matt 13:18–22).

Christ is emphasizing for his disciples that our material problems are tied up with social and spiritual formations. Jesus warns that bringing about transformation does not simply require that one shares information. People shaped by empire, especially those with privilege and power, simply cannot understand because their hearts are shaped by a world that claims competition, growth, self-reliance, and wealth to be the governing values of nature. Others do not have the blessing of relationships and living situations that will foster moral courage in the face of resistance. To change how they eat, work, live, and relate goes against social norms that could mean their utter isolation. And still others are too tightly gripped by the immediate concerns of next month's mortgage payment or the distant hope of wealth to even contemplate a change. They might worry about what they will wear, about the loss not just of subsistence but of an identity if they no longer have that house, job, or lifestyle. I confess that I find myself stumbling over these obstacles all of the time. Simply learning the facts and becoming informed does not take these away. Rather, we need to be invited into a community that is already embodying a different way of life.

Jesus underlines not just the challenge that the disciples will face, but he notes that when they start to live in the ways of the kingdom,

they will have abundance. He tells them, "as for what was sown on the good soil, this is the one who hears the word and understands it, who indeed bears fruit and yields, in one case a hundredfold, in another sixty, and in another thirty" (Matt 13:23). They will have more than they need, and from their abundance they can cultivate and nourish, serve and preserve God's good earth so that others may be invited and transformed.

...

Jesus' parable is directed toward material, social, and spiritual transformation. It challenges the very earthly ways of extraction that lead to the exploitation of people and the degradation of the land. But it is not only about getting the poor the calories they need. It is about renewing the covenant—the relationships that shape and animate life. The parable challenges the social structures that make these dynamics difficult to see for the poor. The teaching to the disciples further highlights the obstacles that those who are shaped by the empire of wealth will face in becoming agents of the kingdom of God. These are social and spiritual issues that lead people, even those who are informed, to hear the good news of new life and retreat into that which is familiar and secure—even if it is the security of a prison.

Christ's parable directs our attention to the ways that we care for the land and our neighbors. This confrontation forces us to ask: who do we ultimately serve, Caesar or God? We answer this question in the ways we structure our houses, direct our labor, shape our relationships, and dress our bodies. The ways of empire devour the commonwealth, scorch the fertility of the earth, and choke out loving community. Do we have ears to hear how the scriptures point us toward the ways of the kingdom of God come to earth?

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A proper creation care theology will evince a thorough read of the Old Testament/Hebrew Bible (OT/HB). Reason being that the OT/HB is arguably the principal factor that unites all Christians (and Jews) in terms of a shared source of imagination and a common “language” with which to understand the world—that is, of course, Christ and the New Testament notwithstanding. Without the OT/HB, we would know nothing about God, ourselves, or God’s creation which we inhabit. Indeed, the NT remains relevant. Yet for now, suffice to say that the OT/HB deserves first treatment because it is the first testament, and because it surpasses the NT in sheer word count as well as words speaking directly about creation care. Hence, I commend the following summary of the OT/HB, which highlights some of its key themes regarding creation care. This summary is based on the Jewish canon of the OT/HB, which comprises three major sections: the Law (*Torah*), the Prophets (*Nevi'im*), and the Writings (*Ketuvim*).

The first five books of the OT/HB—Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy—form what is called (among many names) the *Torah*, meaning “law/teaching.” Narratively, it is vast in scope, running from creation to Canaan-land. Distilling such a thick and broad-sweeping collection is difficult to say the least. Nonetheless, for teaching purposes, I suggest that the *Torah* has at least two key themes: divine creation(s) and divine command(s). Divine creation(s) refers to how that the *Torah* deals directly with the character of God, the nature of the world, and the being of its inhabitants. From Genesis, we learn that God is both at once creator of the cosmos and garden-in-chief over all creation(s)—human and otherwise (Gen 1–3). Likewise, divine command(s), refers to the *Torah*’s chief concern about the purpose of God’s creation(s) and especially that of human creatures. Namely, God created human creatures to announce God’s reign throughout creation by imaging God, and to tend and keep creation—cultivating from/within it, life, health, and well-being unto perpetuity (1:26–28; 2:15).

The middle section of the OT/HB is called the *Nevi'im* (or “the Prophets”) and is delineated into the Former Prophets (Joshua, Judges, Samuel, and Kings) and the Latter Prophets (Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and the Twelve Minor Prophets). Whilst the *Torah* takes us from creation to Canaan-land, the Former Prophets detail the taking of the land (think Joshua) to the losing of the land (think Judges, Samuel, and Kings). Likewise, the Latter Prophets explain the losing of the land, giving reasons as to why the Israelites lost it. Land is important to creation care theology be-

cause, in the biblical imagination, it is—quite literally[!]-the very grounds through which all God’s creations (human and non-human) are to experience God’s blessing(s), concretely in the form of food, water, and habitation. In other words, blessing is not just some abstract spiritual concept or well-wish. But rather, blessing has taste and savor.

Thus, part of our calling as God’s people is to attend to the land

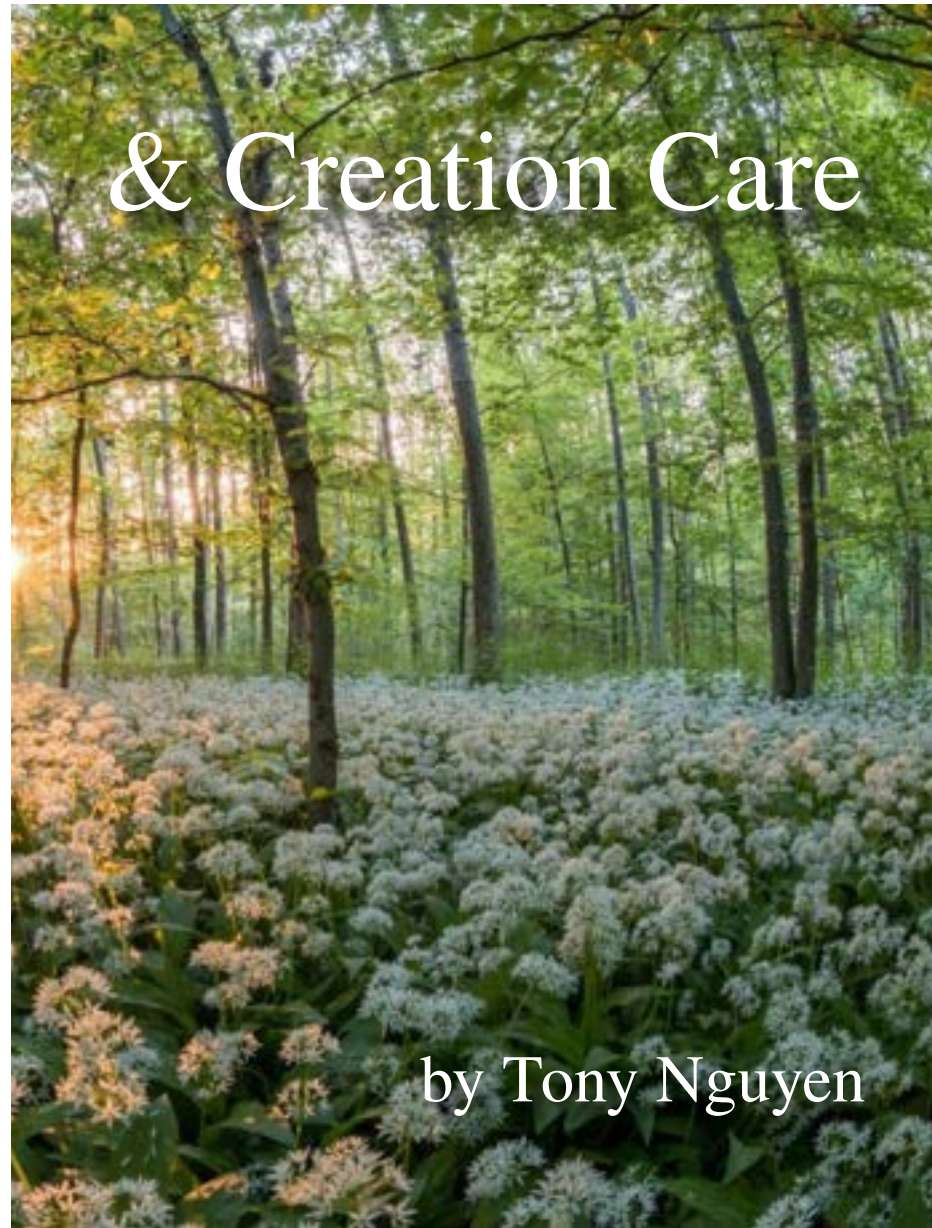


the Old Testament

in order to preserve it, thereby ensuring that all God’s creation(s) may enjoy God’s blessing(s) unto perpetuity. And yet, this is exactly where God’s people have failed. Hence, one of the key themes of the *Nevi'im* is the proclamation of God’s judgment, justice, and righteousness. In the biblical story, rather than attending to the land and being a blessing to its neighbors, the Israelites eventually gave into worshiping all sorts of idols and foreign gods. Interestingly, what some of us might not know is that in the ancient world, accepting the patronage of foreign gods was often part-and-parcel with negotiating socio-politico-economic agreements.

For example, during the time of the prophet Amos (around the 8th century), the Israelite kingdoms of Israel and Judah had been striking massive trade deals with its neighboring nations on exports of grain, olive oil, and wine. The results of which were newfound heights of wealth and affluence yet to be experienced by the Israelites up until this point. While wealth and affluence may sound good on the surface, the reality of the matter was that not all Israelites felt the effects of their kingdoms' success. Indeed, many if not most Israelites actually became impoverish, often

other gods who were not the LORD God of Israel. Of course, upon reading the rest of the book of Amos, the writer makes clear that the result of the Israelites' dealings was their destruction at the hands of the Assyrian Empire. In sum, the book of Amos (along with all the Latter Prophets) makes clear that God is in the business of doing justice, and doing justice means exacting due judgment upon all who do and do not uphold righteousness upon the land.



& Creation Care

by Tony Nguyen

going into debt slavery due to their rulers' foreign trade policies which led to many Israelite families getting kicked off their own ancestral lands and even at times coming back onto those lands not as owners but as slaves to those lands which, at one time, used to grow all sorts of produce and foodstuffs for their own kitchen tables, then became massive estates dedicated to producing commoditized exports which only foreign nations and affluent Israelites had the luxury of reaping the benefits from. And again, all of this was laden with the reception and acknowledgment of

The third section of the OT/HB is the *Ketuvim* (or "the Writings") which begins with the Wisdom books (Psalms, Proverbs, and Job) and ends with Chronicles. In between are the Five Megillot (or "Scrolls"), which include Song of Songs, Ruth, Lamentations, Ecclesiastes, and Esther, then followed by Daniel, Ezra, and Nehemiah. This last section is perhaps the hardest on which to pinpoint one coherent theme throughout each book, as each is vastly different from the other regarding genre, style, literary form, etc. Even so, one could say at least that the *Ketuvim* is interested in life and life with God. As to creation care, I add that it is interested in life with God on the land, in and with creation. Of course, each book brings its own unique concerns vis-à-vis creation care. For example, Proverbs suggests that wise living directly translates into creation's life, health, and wellbeing (ex. 3:5–11; 12:11). Yet contrarily, Ecclesiastes suggests that this is not always the case; rather concluding that life, health, and well-being finally depend on God's grace (ex. Eccl. 2). Even so, because the *Ketuvim* is multivalent, any theological points about creation care will require a robust interpretation of all its books—as it should be with the entire OT/HB!

Lastly, note that I have all but nearly avoided using individual bible verses in constructing this theology of creation care, instead opting for whole books—and as many as possible! This was intentional. I believe that if we were meant to draw a theology of creation care—or of anything—from just a few verses, then perhaps we would have only received those few verses. However, that is not what we were gifted. Instead, we were gifted the whole OT/HB canon consisting of whole books which (evidenced by how we have received them) we are meant to read in conversation, each book alongside the other. Therefore, this creation care theology is by no means exhaustive but merely a foretaste into the wide world that is the OT/HB.



THE TALBERTS

Before we even moved to Greensboro, we decided our acre and a quarter would be cultivated in a way that draws out beauty, provides food, and establishes order and purpose, reflecting the Divinely-intended harmony between creation and God's gardener priests. Though we have been tempted to fell many trees, we have restricted ourselves to a few that obscure the sun's reach to our garden, and to make space for an eventual orchard. It has been an unusual process of discernment: "You may stay," "You are out of place and causing problems." So, it has not been a haphazard approach to our bit of creation, but our participation in its ordering and meaningfulness.

Our "ordering"--the digging, removing, chopping, tilling, choosing, and occasional Christian swearing--has produced a vegetable and cutting flower garden in a way that harnesses the narrow window created by the removal of a few hickories, a maple, and a double-trunked white oak. I imagine the performances of our tasks match well the scene in the first Garden: the woman had the vision, planning, the seeds, and the dedication to regularly tend. The man nodded, as if to say, "It's good," and began the chopping, digging, irrigation, and building. It works well for us this way, and the division of labor is not so sharply delineated that we cannot be "helpers" to one another. This season has yielded a great deal of lettuce, radishes, snap peas, and the beginnings of sweet peas and snapdragons.

In this ordering process, and to atone for those felled trees, my wife has planted dozens of native, shade-growing flora, and has

distributed with care--in the depths of our woods or on the fringes where they can get a larger taste of sunlight--the swamp roses placed strategically along a natural drainage gully, and winterberry as a signal of hope to stand against the brown and gray of winter when it returns: Our White Tree of Gondor...but as a red berry bush in the leaf litter.

In maintaining peace with creation, we have left many trees, and have cultivated under the eaves of one oak a rather expansive shade garden, layered with day lilies, columbine, heuchera, allium, Irish moss, peonies, and some weird purpley plant that I was intent on having, yet promptly forgot its name. We have even managed to squeeze in a few blueberry bushes, a Meyer lemon, and a thornless blackberry trellis. The bleeding hearts suffered under the feet of our children (and perhaps an unaware adult), like orcs with their axes, but their damage has decreased over the year as they have learned to appreciate the time and value of the garden... and perhaps to fear the wrath of their gardener-priest mother.

Most recently, we have added chickens to our lives and yard. This has been a process of patience, caution, and wariness. There is a reason no one says, "smart as a chicken." So much out there endangers their lives, including themselves. As they grow, we look forward to the pay-off of eggs and outfoxing the foxes, but also the complement of creatures and foliage as their carers delight in this sacramental ordering of the land as a gesture of hope that one day the lion will lay down with the lamb and He will make all things new.



THE LEWISES



I grew up in a household where, during my childhood, there was at least some form of a garden nearly every year, and I have fond memories of "helping" my dad create and tend it. As an adult, maybe two to three times in the eight years my wife Jennifer and I owned a home in metro Atlanta (pre-kids,) we had a small garden, but that was simply "buy a few small plants from Home Depot, put them in the ground, throw out some Sevin dust and chemical fertilizer, and see what happens." At that time, I didn't think about it in terms of taking care of God's creation or participating in His wondrous food cycle; it was merely a utilitarian exercise that was kinda cool to do and yielded better-tasting tomatoes than those we could get in the grocery store. Gardening certainly wasn't part of any greater ethos to me at the time.



That all changed in the winter/spring of 2017-2018, primarily because of the influence of the Farm at New Garden Park on our family. I saw the wonder and excitement in our children's eyes when they could eat food mere moments after harvesting it. Soon, I internalized their message about stewarding the land and connecting with God's creation. I was in, but it was rather last minute. We made the decision to have a garden in early April 2018, and within a couple of weeks, everything we would plant that year was in the ground. There was little planning. Some things grew quite well; others didn't. Still others (like squash and zucchini) produced well for a month or so before being destroyed by pests that I'd never heard of prior to then (Lord, do we *really* need squash vine borers??). However, through both the successes and failures, I was thoroughly hooked after that year. Since then, I've gleaned wisdom from Lena and other Christian gardeners/farmers, taken numerous classes through the NC Extension Service, and have greatly expanded our gardening areas to approximately 1,500 square feet, in addition to a small walk-in greenhouse to germinate seedlings, protecting them from the elements during late winter and early spring. I've even learned to arrange home-grown flower bouquets for my wife and daughters!

Spring 2021 marks my fourth season as an organic gardener, and I'd like to share a recent "God moment." Back in mid-February,



Greensboro experienced two ice storms within less than a week. Our home lost power service for 36 hours during the first one, but our generator

kept the heater in our small greenhouse powered. Upon entering the greenhouse at one point during the storm, I was struck by the incredible contrast between life outside the greenhouse, and that within. I snapped a few photos.

Outside was icy, barren, and death-like, but in the greenhouse, there was life, growth, and a glimpse of what was to come in spring and summer. What a picture of life in Christ, versus that outside of Him! When we "greenhouse" our souls by placing ourselves in optimal situations for growth (spending time with God in prayer, reading His Word, worshiping Him, fellowshiping with His people,) we set ourselves up to have life abundantly (John 10:10), to catch glimpses of the Glory that is to come! (Romans 8:18) and to grow and flourish (Philippians 1:6, John 15:5).

Indeed, the oft-quoted teaching of Jesus in John 15:5 captures much of what I experienced that day: "I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing." I can be a slow learner of spiritual lessons, and I tend toward being far too dependent on my own gifts and talents rather than embracing the lesson of the vine and the branches. We truly do live in a barren, broken, icy world—one where both spiritual and physical death surrounds us. But if we remain connected to Him—our soul's greenhouse—we will bear fruit. Apart from that connection, like my plants, we can do nothing. May the Redeemer family be a people who are diligent about greenhousing our souls.

CARING FOR THE LAND

by Rev. Alan Hawkins



After their wandering and waiting, preparation and acquisition, the Israelites at last take possession of the Promised Land. They do so as different tribes, determined by the lineage of their parents. As seen in Joshua 14-21, the people are given the land to care for and to utilize for their tribe. The purpose of the land is to care for the people of the land. We were made as physical beings in a corporeal world, placed intentionally into the balance between human and all other creation: the two parts feeding, sustaining, and caring for each other in a divinely appointed rhythm. Here at New Garden Park, we care for the land we've been given as one family. Although we have volunteers and staff who contribute to the work, the care of this property is our responsibility. We're the tribe that's entered this land and our intention is to care for it theologically, ecologically, and communally.

THEOLOGICALLY

Creation care is a godly thing. Why didn't God just fashion us into legions of disembodied angelic beings floating around relating to each other? What's the purpose of stuff? How do you care about something theologically? To have a belief that "stuff" matters means you treat it as such. God has designed us to be physical beings in physical spaces: meaning that land and dirt and fruit and bugs actually matter. This physical world is the vehicle by which God has created a people for himself, where he will be with them and care for them from now to eternity. In this issue of *The Table*, we are exploring stories from the parish of folks who are embodying in their own zip codes this belief in and practice of the cultivation of space. They do this--indeed, we are doing this, together--because space and matter are gifts to us for our good. Christian theology says your spirit and body are equally important. This truth is Eucharistic. It's why bread and wine are used in this rite. God purposed crushed wheat grains to form bread, used to symbolize who Christ is to us. Jesus doesn't just say "think about me in your hearts," but he asks us to remember him with our whole selves, experiencing him through external visceral elements as well as internal spiritual ones.

ECOLOGICALLY

As we cultivate this property, we are intentionally looking for ways to utilize the land that will sow back into it and bless it for genera-

tions to come. When buying this property, we had to research and test our soil because we're close to the airport: they are only one of many neighbors to our property whose use of the land affects New Garden Park. Through our work here, we are healing this land, whose soil has been subject to years of degradation. What we do to our property, we eventually leave to our community of the future. We want to be a good neighbor to our world, leaving what we've been given better than we found it. Our land is affected by what is around us, and we affect what is around us. We keep this at the forefront of our mind as we plan and work in the now. For many of us, we think so shortsightedly. Having a longer horizon of vision for what God has entrusted to us makes us consider the impact of our actions (positively or negatively) for years to come. Imagine years down the road, New Garden Park bursting with material health and vibrancy not just for our tribe, but for those to come.

COMMUNALLY

Umuganda day--our monthly community work day at the property--is the most obvious place where communal cultivation happens at New Garden Park. In the last two months, we've seen almost 200 people come out to help. We eat breakfast and lunch together; we work hard together to accomplish our dreams and goals for this place. What a joy it is to see people taking responsibility and building affection for this place. Everyone taking a part in caring for the land, fellowshiping together and practicing gratitude for the gift we've been given, increases our ownership of this land. As you will see in the personal stories from within our community, our joint work at NGP also builds or reinforces individual commitment to creation care in our homes and hearts. What we practice as a group has far-reaching effects on the individual life: our togetherness is the place where we learn, grow, and are equipped for God's particular calling for our lives and resources.

If you want to take part in the work at New Garden Park, a first step would be to read the stories in these pages, discovering the many ways our community has been inspired towards creation care not only in life at the property, but in individual lives and homes. Then, attend Umuganda Day, lending your hands and feet to the labor at New Garden Park. Let these experiences draw you towards contemplating your own calling as a steward of the spaces and places God has given you.





ADAM & HOPE ACADEMY

As a Greensboro Fellow, I was required to spend a certain amount of hours a week volunteering. When Dodd Drake, the Fellows director, said that Lena would need help starting New Garden Park Farm, I thought this would be a simple task. Little did I know that I was taking part in something that would be deeply forming. I had experience working in gardens, but I had never thought or desired to connect this to my spiritual life. I had never thought of it as something that was not only redeeming for people, but something that was restorative for all of creation. It was in the many conversations and the dreaming in 2017 about what NGP would become that I really saw the Lord beginning to connect the dots between land stewardship and justice. I appreciate Lena Van Wyk helping me to see the seeds in my life that had already been planted from folks like my grandmother, and challenging me to not be afraid to tap back into those ancestral practices. As part of my time volunteering on the land, Lena also passed along a book by the author Bell Hooks called *Belonging: A Culture of Place*.

As my Fellows year came to a close, I knew that I wanted to stay at my work placement Hope Academy. I had grown to really love the school and Hope Academy has some of the greatest students in the world. When I was asked to become the middle school science teacher and to focus on taking a hands-on approach, I could see the handiwork of the Lord at play. Having spent a year learning how to garden well and restore broken land, I felt equipped to use the school garden space as a place of learning.

At the time of taking over the school garden at Hope in 2018, there were four raised beds with nothing growing in them. Fast forward to now, and we have nine raised beds, two pollinator gardens, and an assortment of flowers. Getting to restore and add beauty to our neighborhood does not just strengthen the academic experience, but can also be deeply spiritual for both teacher and students. The garden has become a real touch point for the Glenwood neighborhood. From folks just enjoying the beauty of the plants, to people putting their yard scraps in our compost bin, to being able to give out produce during the pandemic.



PRIYA & AQUAPONICS

Last spring, I was gifted one 55-gallon fish tank as well as a five-tiered wire shelving unit--so, I had no more excuses for not trying my hand at aquaponics! I bought a fountain pump, some tubing, a few trays, and got to work. I now have a small 10-gallon aquaponics tank growing orchids and other houseplants and a large 55-gallon aquaponics tank growing vegetables and herbs, both set up in the sunny bedroom windows of my town home.

They are little microcosms, with fish creating the waste that feeds the plants and the plants filtering the water for the fish. It fills my bedroom with crystal clear water, bright tropical fish, overflowing aquatic plants, abundant herbs and flourishing houseplants, and a quiet waterfall noise. God has taught me just how much greater He is than us humans: He keeps the whole world with all its worries and stresses and disasters in balance, while I'm here just trying to keep a few fish in a 10-gallon tank in balance! His design is so intricate and personal, attending to individual needs but interconnecting everything into community. The invisible bacteria, the pH, each little fish, baby fish, snail, plant for shelter or food, oxygen, carbon dioxide--all are working together in give and take to main-

tain balance and growth. My tanks are all set up to pump on timers, so all I do is replenish the water that is lost to evaporation and plant use, and harvest the plants. I set it up in keeping with God's design, and now get to enjoy watching as it all grows, which is yet another life lesson through aquaponics.





The first time Alan shared the vision for the Parish/Park/Farm/Abbey with me, we were sitting on the grass at a Grasshopper's game close to the playground so our little kids could rotate between that spot and rolling down the hill where we were sitting. He spoke of a Farm, with someone hired to oversee it and maybe even live on the grounds, and of an Abbey where new ministries and Christian businesses could take root with no or low rent until they were established; of a Park, which would be a place of beauty, rest, and retreat, and of course of a Parish, where our church body could gather to worship and fellowship together. I loved what he shared and was hooked from the beginning. I believe that was back in 2010 and the land/facilities that God has since opened the door for us to acquire were nowhere on our radar.

Here we are in 2021 with some of our kids now in college and the others hot on their heels. The vision Alan first shared with me 11 years ago is taking form and function with beautiful results already. We have a working farm which operated a free farmer's market last fall with plans to do so again soon. We have office space rented for ministries like Combat Female Veterans Families United. We have a beautiful sanctuary and greenhouse for services, fellowship, and special events. The land has been used for interactive stations of the cross during the season of Lent and has a garden prayer labyrinth. God has been faithful and generous to invite us into this vision and we need to be faithful in executing it with integrity, wisdom, and intentionality.

To this end, I was humbled to be asked to chair the Master Plan Vision Team whose purpose is to look at the future, big picture of our land use and make recommendations to the Vestry on best design layouts to facilitate multiple ministry agendas. Our current church body is already embracing many ministries that all demand space

(the farm for crops; the Abbey for retreat and edification; the youth and children's ministries for classroom as well as outdoor space). And yet, there is a vision to not only see each of these ministries expand, but for us to add more in the future. Where will we designate land for livestock? Can we build homes on the land for people who will contribute to various ministries? How can we expand our venue space and facilities for special events? Where will we build the world's largest water slide that Drew Hill wants? In short, how will we be using our land 5, 10, or 25 years from now?

The Master Plan Vision Team will first seek to take inventory of how each ministry area is already using the land and facilities. We then plan to solicit feedback on all the hopes and dreams that staff, ministry leaders, and congregation members have for future growth and land use. Looking at current state versus future vision, while making sure we comply with county/state ordinances and building codes, we will make recommendations to the Vestry on layout, design, and multi-use facility management. It is anticipated that this will be a process that is drawn out over several years to continue to hear from stakeholders and ensure the best path forward is being pursued.

No matter your role at Church of the Redeemer, whether a member, a staff member, or anything in between, I am grateful to be a part of the Body with you. It is inspiring to see so many volunteering with time, finances, labor, ideas, and prayer to have so many ministries thriving on this land! May we continue to grow into all that God has for us with excellence, obedience, and joy!

(If you have interest in applying to be part of this team, please contact the church for an application.)

by Doug West





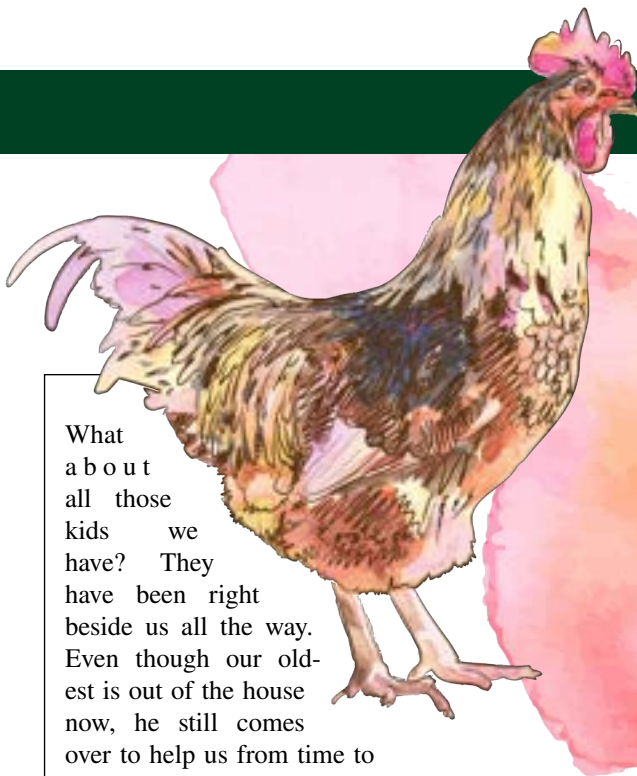
THE WEBERS

Three and a half years ago, God provided a home that fit all eight of us, in addition to an acre of land. This was the first home we bought, so we immediately started dreaming like crazy about all the things we could do on an acre. We longed to create a haven where our kids could safely explore God's creation and where others could enjoy God's gifts with us.

The first year, we focused on starting a garden, planting a few fruit trees, and of course having a baby! The second year, we expanded the garden and began the fight with pests. Since we live on the edge of town, we have every pest you can imagine: deer, rabbits,

skunks, foxes, and lots of bugs that were all thrilled by our garden. (Well, the foxes waited until we had chickens.) Last year, as everything started to shut down due to the pandemic, we decided to majorly expand the garden and get some chickens. Since we eat about six dozen eggs a week, we decided to start with 25 hens. A few months later, we got a rabbit from Redeemer's rabbitry, which quickly turned to five rabbits, then to 19 rabbits, now to 27 rabbits...you get the picture. This year, while we have been growing our rabbitry, we have also been busy replacing the 11 hens that the foxes enjoyed over the winter. We got 12 replacement hens and added four ducklings to go with them.





What about all those kids we have? They have been right beside us all the way. Even though our oldest is out of the house now, he still comes over to help us from time to time. The kids have helped to plant the garden, pull weeds, spread dirt, harvest veggies, and preserve them for winter. Now that we have animals, it is their job to feed them every day. One of our goals has been to teach our children the valuable tools of caring for our land and watching it provide for us. They have been busy learning how life works, the good and the bad: The joy of new baby animals and the pain of losing one of their beloved pets. They have also learned that to raise animals requires responsibility and a lot of hard work. But this doesn't stop them from asking for more: "When can we get a goat?" "Can we get more land so we can get a horse?" "Do you think we could put a cow on an acre?" (Confession: Cherie asked the last one; Ben was happy with the ducks.) At least half of the kids have decided that they want to be farmers when they grow up.



The pandemic interrupted our plans to invite others into our haven this past year. This spring, we had some of the youth from our East African congregation work with us on our land to raise money for Camp Booyah. Watching their joy as they dug in the dirt and planted seeds made our dream, started over three years ago, a reality. As our lives return to "normal," we are looking forward to inviting others onto our acre to enjoy this little piece of God's creation.





THE WALLS

Six years ago our family moved from Houston TX to Greensboro NC. Before we moved, Leah and I sat down and made a list of the things we wanted in a new house. We wanted our home to be a place of connection and nourishment, and spent a lot of time talking about our desire to find an older home in an urban setting that was within walking distance to downtown. We wanted a house small enough that we'd have to bump into each other and learn to be at peace with that, but also a big yard. Having container gardened in the past, we hoped to be able to establish an in-ground garden to help cut costs on produce throughout the year. Through God's provision, we landed on the corner of Fairmont Street in the historic Westerwood neighborhood in downtown Greensboro. Here, we began a new chapter in our family's life. While our new house was not our first choice, we know it was what God intended for us. And it checked all of our boxes. Sort of. When we moved into our home, you could barely see the house from either street side. The land for a garden was there, but you couldn't really see it. The large magnolia tree in the front yard had been neglected for years and had grown almost up to the front entrance of the house. In addition, almost the entire yard--front, sides, and back--was overgrown with decades of English ivy, cedar and pine trees, and holly bushes reaching their branches to the heavens high over the power lines, not to mention a small forest of untamed vines and a host of other things growing wild and free down one side of our house. Our yard was a huge neglected mess and the house had suffered the effects.

One morning, Leah and I walked out onto our wobbly, dilapidated deck (we built a new one during the pandemic; woohoo!) with our coffee in hand and began to vision cast for the gift God had provided for us. I remember her saying clearly, "I'd like a small garden and think it would fit nice over there" (pointing to the most neglected 1/8 acre of our property). After exchanging a few ideas and writing a very long "honey do" list of things that needed resurrecting, we went our separate ways to go about our day.

Over the course of the next few weeks and months, whenever our schedules allowed, we exorcised the demonic out of the yard. We pulled and pulled and pulled and pulled ivy and then mowed and sprayed ivy (with an organic spray of course). No more ivy! Praise God. Then we cut down bushes and trees, and then dug up and burned a lot of stumps. No more tangled pine forest! Praise God.

After we cleared the land, we decided to erect our garden using the no-dig raised bed method where we built 8 raised beds that totaled 500+ square feet of garden space. We dedicated the middle of the garden to a welcoming meeting space with a fire pit and lights with the hope of inviting neighbors into this space of nourishment and flourishing. For the next four years, our garden produced a lot of produce and we have had many memorable evenings gathered around the fire. We invited neighbors at Halloween and in the spring for a garden tour. We've met there with new classes of fellows. We've sat with our own family on quiet nights.



Our youngest, Cassian, took his first steps in a little patch of grass out there. We have so enjoyed the gift of the land--a place to work and rest and play--picking raspberries and tomatoes. We sit on a swing in the magnolia tree all the time now.

When the pandemic hit we, like many people, decided it was time to plant more food with the intent of becoming more self-sufficient as a family, not only for ourselves but also for others. We had been utilizing every square inch of our garden, but we made a mammoth decision to convert almost the entirety of our yard (front, sides, and the other half of our backyard) into a food forest. Along with our two existing peach trees, we planted four more, in addition to two plum trees, a persimmon tree, two pear trees, a nectarine tree, two fig trees, two apple trees, a pomegranate tree, a beaked hazelnut tree, two sea berry bushes, two goumi bushes, 14 blueberry bushes, two nanking cherry bushes, three sour cherry bushes, two yogi berry bushes, multiple blackberry and raspberry vines, some grape vines, sun choke (google it; it's quite tasty), and an insane amount of strawberry plants interwoven throughout our property; all of which is growing AMAZINGLY.

Recently, we disposed of all the raised garden beds (they were rotting) and redesigned the garden. We decided to follow the berm and swale on contour garden method based on the Farm at New Garden Park. In addition, we transformed a large portion of our front yard into a fruit tree guild where we are currently growing 25+ herbs and beneficial plants for the fruit trees, bushes, and wildlife (butterflies and bees). We realized that many of the difficulties that we had with our raised bed garden were the result of trying to get only what we wanted from the land. As friends joined us to dig and prepare the new garden, we knew that now there would be a closer partnership between our work and the natural way of things. We have already seen the fruit of that collaboration. We have also been gracious recipients of the kindness of our church family in sharing wisdom, resources, plants and physical labor.

The Lord has blessed the land through the work of our hands.

What began as a small raised bed garden (Leah will correct me and say it was a rather large raised bed garden) has transformed into a 1/4 acre food forest. There are plans for every square inch of our property to produce food, beneficial plants or herbs and we are well on our way to achieving that goal.

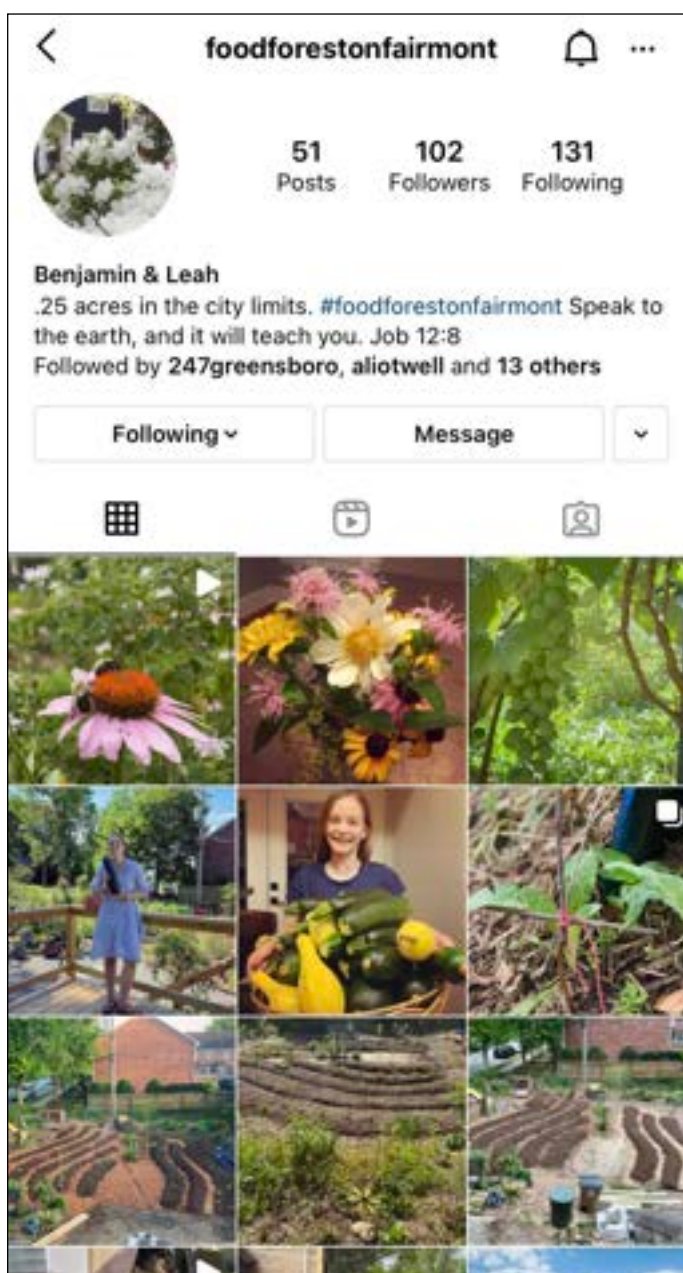
Our little urban food forest also draws us further into the cycles of liturgical living through the tradition of Rogation Days and closer observance of natural seasons that are echoed in the liturgical year, from feast to feast. The garden invites us to work and pray. It invites us to a life of greater awareness. Not a day goes by where a neighbor or people just driving by don't stop and ask about what's going on around our property. The land God has gifted us with has gifted others through conversations as well as its harvest. We've had more organic conversations about what God is up to in our lives through the gift of this land and the produce it provides than ever before. And the cool thing is that in almost

every instance, these conversations are not ones we have had to start. God has and continues to use our small 1/4 acre of property to cultivate relationships and conversations about what is good, noble, and true with our neighbors, friends, family, and strangers.

But this is not the end of the story.

Once we figure out how to keep the squirrels from stealing our peaches, our plan is to build a small greenhouse out of antique windows (fyi: we will take your old wooden windows), raise quail eggs and meat (YUMMY), and then begin the process of transforming the rest of our front yard into a perennial native wildflower haven.

Follow our food forest adventure on Instagram!



BEARING WITNESS

by Adam Hubert

While I know it is not my ancestral homeland, the sparseness of the historical record tells me that Alabama is home. Not home in the way that it was a place I lived for most of my life, that would be Chattanooga, but a place that was home to the people and cultures that formed me. Both of my parents are from “LA,” better known as “Lower Alabama”: Aliceville and Atmore to be exact. This is not the Alabama of Reese Witherspoon movies, that one Lynard Skynard song, or Bear Bryant, Nick Saban and the 18 National Championships for the Alabama Crimson Tide. The Alabama I know looks more like fish fries, cotton fields, old school Chevys, dirt roads, farming, church on Sunday, and hurricanes. As a kid, I knew that hurricanes were often destructive, but just as Zora Neale Hurston wrote in her essential book *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, a key part to southern Black life. Atmore, just two miles from the Florida state line, is in the path of most storms that blow in from the Atlantic or hit the Gulf of Mexico. Many are the memories of trips to Alabama spent fixing roofs, repairing drain systems, or remembering the family goats that drowned due to flooding. To some, these events come off as trivial, but it was in these moments that I learned that storms can be deeply traumatizing. In an instant, something of deep value and the ways one identifies a place as home can be taken away. What really cemented for me the pain and trauma that comes from storms came from Uncle Norman.

Uncle Norman was *that dude*. He was known as one of the best brick masons in town. His fish fries were top tier and everyone in town wanted a piece. His red and black Chevy Camaro z28 SS was fly enough for any Hollywood heist movie. But what really made Uncle Norman stand out from the crowd was his elephant-like memory. He was known for having an impeccable memory and was often asked to refer back to things in the heat of debate. When hurricane season would roll around, Uncle Norman and his daughter Amber would often leave Atmore to come stay with my family in Chattanooga if a strong storm was coming through. At first, I saw it as an opportunity to hang out with Amber and Uncle Norman. We would go fishing, watch movies, talk about sports; as a kid, it felt like an extension of summer vacation in early fall. Whenever the forecasters were predicting a strong storm for their region, I knew to clean the house in eager anticipation of their arrival.

As Hurricane Ivan pushed its way towards their home in 2004, Uncle Norman and Amber made their way to stay with us. Upon their arrival, my quiet yet contemplative 4th-grade mind asked “Why do you always leave when a storm comes”? Norman, with the coolness of a BB King guitar solo, simply said “I don’t like sitting through storms anymore. They scare me.” These two simple sentences would alter the way I viewed storms, particularly hurricanes, for the rest of my life. My uncle, in a rare moment of vulnerability, was able to admit his fear of storms. I knew that there were depths to his mind, and that somewhere in that mind was a memory that was not to be repeated. An experience that he did not want to have again. At the time, I did not have the language to put words to it, but my uncle was naming a trauma in his life. My uncle Norman is someone I think about often as the climate crisis only intensifies these types of storms. His, and many other stories of Black folk in the deep south, is why I decided to become a climate activist.

When I knew my heart was being pulled towards climate activism, it was paramount that I was able to activate my Christian faith in real ways in this arena. It is clear in scripture that God loves creation. From the way He knitted creation together for interdependence to the ways the writers of the Christian holy text found importance in naming and referencing aspects of creation for spiritual formation, it is clear that God intends for us to value creation. Even as the science and our lived reality become ever more clear on the effects of climate change,¹ the American church's thoughts on that matter can be reductionist. There are overwhelming amounts of data that show the way white protestants and evangelicals view climate change.²

In a recent sermon at Redeemer, our sister Ashley Davis spoke to what it means to bear witness, asking questions such as, "what does it look like to bear witness?" and "what do others witness when they encounter the Church?" Another great question to ponder when it comes to climate change is "what should Christians do when we are witnessing hurt and grief in our world?" Many have been formed to think of climate change in pictures of melting ice, habitat loss, and sustainable practices. While these measures to address environmental destruction can be good, we must also remember that all of creation is at stake. Not just the physical locale of creation, but the very beings God created to steward it. It's the refugees from Honduras forced to flee their homeland due to hurricanes,³ it's the children in Flint forced to drink poisoned water, the droughts that lead to wars in Syria,⁴ and it's my Uncle Norman. When Christians bear witness to all of creation groaning for renewal, what shall we do?

We do what Christ empowered us to do: To bring His kingdom into this world, bringing forth a radical vision and hope that replenishes and nourishes all of creation, not depletes it of its life-giving forces. Christians shouldn't just fight in order to offer a live-able future to future generations, but because our holy text calls us to be the stewards of creation. This looks like the many Christians who stood in opposition to the expansion of the Dakota Access Pipeline onto the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe's land that would contaminate their water source. This looks like Christians considering the power of voting and speaking with representatives that want to mitigate the damage done by climate change. This is churches such as Redeemer finding ways to care for creation by restoring broken land and feeding the food insecure in Greensboro.

Uncle Norman was eventually robbed of his great memory due to Alzheimer's. Slowly, we saw the person we once knew become something he was not. On a spiritual level, I believe the many memories I have of him helped shape the ways I bear the witness of Christ as a climate activist. It's his story and the place that he called home that eventually led me to join Young Evangelicals for Climate Action (YECA)--a group of young Christians seeking to bring about climate action in the United States. I remember those like Uncle Norman, who have been struck by climate grief and trauma, in my fight to make our world more like the Creator intended. What are the stories and people that might compel you to do the same?

1 "There's a New Definition of 'Normal' for Weather," <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2021/05/12/climate/climate-change-weather-noaa.html>

2 "Religion and Views on Climate and Energy Issues," <https://www.pewresearch.org/science/2015/10/22/religion-and-views-on-climate-and-energy-issues/>

3 "Central American's Choice: Pray for rain or migrate," <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/latino/central-america-drying-farmers-face-choice-pray-rain-or-leave-n1027346>

4 "A Major Contributor to the Syrian Conflict? Climate change," <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/economy/a-major-contributor-to-the-syrian-conflict-climate-change>



THE WESTS

For decades now, there has been a growing chorus of voices raising the alarm over the global decline in numbers of key pollinators. Both Sarah and I have science backgrounds from our college days, and the data we have seen is frightening. We have felt hopeless at times--how can 1-2 people turn the tide on something so huge in scope? And yet, we wanted to do something to play a part in returning to a more natural balance--or at least to not participate in things that we felt were clearly harmful to creation. So, we took little steps like not using herbicides and pesticides: as a result, our lawn looks green but is chock-full of all sorts of "weeds" mixed in with the grass. We've also focused on slowly working on and expanding our flower beds and garden areas. Cultivating natural beauty through plants and flowers has always been more appealing to us than the work involved in maintaining vegetable gardens.

Then, about 2 years ago, I came across the book *Nature's Best Hope: A New Approach to Conservation That Starts in Your Yard* by Douglas Tallamy. Among other things, he strongly advocates for planting native species with the space you have and reminds us

that if enough people do this, we can affect big change. Influenced by this book, we opted to turn a big section of our front lawn into a native wildflower meadow. For us, this means far more beauty, more food and habitat for native insects/birds/bats, etc. and less mowing--a triple win!

One thing we have learned, and have to keep learning again and again, is to be patient and to appreciate the inevitable anticipation that builds as you wait for God to slowly bring about something of exquisite beauty. In a culture of immediate gratification, having to wait on a seed to germinate and grow over weeks or months before you see its full splendor in an opened blossom is actually a comforting change. As you anticipate the flowers that will be, you are forced to sit back and trust that God will bring it about in his time. There are so many lessons for how that can apply to the situations in our lives.

We are eager to see this in full bloom over the next weeks/months and would love to share this with others! Text Doug at 336-662-2819 if you'd like to drop by.



GIA'S ROSES



When I set out to build a rose garden, I thought the premise was pretty straightforward: dig hole, add amendments, plant rose bush, add water, done. This premise is not totally wrong, just incomplete, especially when you want to grow them organically. What I have learned in this process is that they actually require another component: community.

Rose bushes need a community to flourish. They love to make friends with alliums, and they grow even stronger with more plant friends, like calaminth or catmint, salvia, and sweet alysum. A current theory among botanists is that a diverse plant community in a garden confuses plant predators (like Japanese beetles or aphids), because these insects must land on one plant

multiple times in order to get a strong sense of which plant it is and whether they would like to eat it. If an insect keeps landing on a variety of plants that live in close connection with each other, then it has a much more difficult time deciding whether it wants to eat it or not.

It is not hard for me to draw a connection between this aspect of God's design for plant life and his design for human life. At different points in my life, I have been given various prescriptions for how to live the Christian life: go to church, add a quiet time, tithe, and pray in the morning, before meals, and before bed. These are all such great things, but when lived without Christian community, they are not enough to help us flourish.

COMMUNITY of faith

The COVID-era is starting to come to an end. Believe it or not, our church has grown! COVID did not actually take the wind out of our sails. As our church continues to grow, so does demand for varying types of community.

Community as the Body of Christ is an essential part of who we are as a church. Our mission statement is “To follow Jesus as a worshiping, missional community of faith.” We are not following Jesus alone. We are not fighting the good fight by ourselves. Instead, Christ’s Body is empowered by the Holy Spirit to be a life-giving community where we can already participate in the coming Kingdom of God and reflect it to our city around us.

As our community grows and changes, the way we experience and live out this community changes with us. This new phase will be one shaped by a variety of options. For us, community is not optional: We expect people to participate in at least one of the available forms of fellowship. Here we want to lay out concretely what the options are for experiencing the community of the Body of Christ at Church of the Redeemer.

1. CATECHUMENATE GROUPS: FORMATION

The Catechumenate is a place to be shaped and formed by what Christians believe as expressed in the historical teachings of the Church. The idea here is to build a strong foundation in the faith. Catechesis is a strange word for some, but it simply means instruction and is a deeply biblical concept. An example can be found in Acts 18: 24-25: “Now a Jew named Apollos, a native of Alexandria, came to Ephesus. He was an eloquent man, competent in the Scriptures. He had been instructed [catechized] in the way of the Lord. And being fervent in spirit, he spoke and taught accurately the things concerning Jesus...” Let us, like Apollos, be competent in the scriptures and fervent in the Spirit so we can speak and teach accurately the faith to those around us.

2. LIFE GROUPS: CARE & FELLOWSHIP

In a church the size of Redeemer, the fact is that we are not able to get to know and share life with everyone. Life Group is a place to define a more specific circle of people with whom we can grow, with whom we can care and be cared for, with whom we can have fellowship on a deeper level. We do not refer to these as “Community Groups” anymore, because community happens at various levels and opportunities at Redeemer. We’ve adopted the name “Life Groups” because that is what it is: a place to experience life with each other as we follow Jesus.

3. TRIADS: DISCIPLESHIP

Triads are a word used to describe a group of three people (but can also be two or even four people) that meet on a very regular basis to live life together in such a way as to strengthen, empower, and hold each other accountable to grow in faith. Some churches refer to these groups as “life transformation groups.” What better way to be transformed more into the image of Jesus than to have one or two people walk alongside you in close community to help you define and achieve concrete spiritual goals?

4. SERVING TEAMS: MINISTRY

This is where we all, as ministers of the Gospel, get a chance to do our part in the day to day tasks that keep Church of the Redeemer running. There are ways to serve on Sunday as well as throughout the week, but both of these share a common idea: we want you to serve according to the gifts and strengths God has given you. Recently, Alan shared with me this wisdom: three hours of working together creates more community between people than three years of chatting after service on Sunday.

5. GROWTH SERIES CLASSES: SPIRITUAL GROWTH

All of us have different places we would like to grow in based on where we currently are in our walk with Jesus. Summer Growth classes are an opportunity to hone in on certain topics by participating in a class focused on an area where you would like to grow spiritually. And guess what: there you will find others to grow with who are honing in on the same thing!

6. PASTORAL VISITATION: SHEPHERDING

While our pastors are always working to shepherd the flock at Redeemer, you might be in need of a more concrete meeting. Let us know and we will be happy to send one of our shepherds to spend time listening to what’s on your heart, and to pray and care for you.

Do you have questions? Would you like to get connected somewhere? Feel free to shoot me an email at jared@redeemergso.org. I look forward to helping you find your best fit within our church community.

by Jared Wensyel

Community @ Redeemer



Catechumenate Groups
formation

Triads
Discipleship



Serving Teams
ministry

Growth Series Classes
Spiritual growth



Life Groups
Care & fellowship

Pastoral Visitation
Shepherding





THE FISSELS

What we affectionately refer to as “Fissel Farms” currently consists of 10 chickens, 7 raised beds, two berry patches and a developing English-style flower garden. I’m slightly terrified of chickens and as a family, we’re not wildly adventurous in eating vegetables. So, why do we do the weeding and digging, composting and planting, watering and harvesting? It’s a mystery to my own self sometimes, but I think the answer to the question might be *wonder*.

Looking back, I see that the beginnings of our first garden came after I fell in love with Barbara Kingsolver’s book *Animal, Vegetable, Miracle*. Soon after that experience, I had started exclusively shopping at the farmer’s market, buying local meat, eggs, and milk for the first time in my life, and eating what vegetables were seasonal. I bought grains and spices in bulk. I started using essential oils. Kingsolver’s book put me in touch with the wonder of our natural world and the joy and responsibility of preserving that wonder so that in some small way, I might reclaim it from the hands of those who systematically manipulate, engineer, and attempt to control and monetize it. Because of this shift, Mikey decided to build me garden boxes. He erroneously thought he would handle the initial grunt work and leave me to it. He had no way of knowing how quickly he would fall in love with the work of gardening, and how much the boxes were for him as much as for me.

We had our first child in the midst of growing that garden, and watching him toddle out to the strawberry patch to wait for me to hunt down strawberries that he would devour whole, or gingerly step up to the chicken coop to offer long blades of grass to “the girls,” only solidified our desire to keep the momentum going. Since then, our family has grown to five with the addition of our twins, and watching the kids experience and enjoy the wonder of the natural world is ever more a potent motivator to continue gardening. Their curiosity and awe at the most simple things happening within our little plot of land leads me into reverence, awareness, and worship. And this wealth is at our fingertips in every moment that we have eyes and ears to behold it.

I don’t have to look far to offer an example of what I mean. Just this morning (May 26), the kids and I rushed outside after breakfast to beat the heat of the day and accomplish some garden tending. That morning after letting the chickens into the run, Mikey had pulled our first radish, and he suggested there might be more ready to harvest. The kids had never harvested radishes before and excitement was high. We made a beeline for the row of floppy radish greens and indeed, colorful little heads were peeking above the soil. Everyone had the pleasure of tugging one or two into the light, little voices gasping at the oddly shaped treasures that had been hiding

only moments before beneath the earth (as Mikey reminds me, it is not only the children who experience this thrill). From there, we moved onto the (now familiar) task of combing through our strawberry patch. The two or three seedlings we planted the year before had outgrown their box and cast out hundreds of shoots like fishing lines, commandeering a much larger adjacent box for their eager expansion. This green colony is bursting with fruit at the moment and almost daily, we fill whatever is on hand--buckets, shirts, hats, but mostly bellies. The strawberries are in the boxes right next to our fenced-in chicken run and when we hit a rotten or bug-eaten strawberry, we toss it over the fence to the chickens. Squatting in the dirt, engaged in this process, my oldest and I discussed the fact that nothing in our garden (and indeed, in nature) goes to waste: we eat the good strawberries and the bad ones get eaten by the chickens, who are nourished by them before pooping out the remains, which will make it into our compost bins and eventually added back into our soil to produce more fruit for our bodies. “Isn’t God’s design amazing?” I ask, myself enraptured by the thought of it. “Nothing is wasted,” Jon Luke agrees.





What our garden gives us is much more than food for our bodies. It was a great joy during the pandemic to luxuriate in the bounty of our garden--strawberries in the early summer, more watermelon and cherry tomatoes than we could eat in mid to late summer, and an overabundance of romaine lettuce in the early fall. We harvested pumpkins, roasting the seeds and pureeing the rest into pies and smoothies. We tried our first cabbage, which turned into a meal that no one but mom would eat. We preciously combed through our young blackberry and raspberry bushes, cherishing the few early fruits of our labor, sometimes splitting one berry between two mouths. COVID untethered us from all sorts of reliable moorings in our lives, but we became quite literally grounded to the place we found ourselves with our toes and fingers in the dirt, our bodies filled with nourishment and pleasure by the tastes and textures that grew outside our back door.

This year, we were able to finally use the compost we have been cultivating for two years. It is enriching our 2021 garden and sending up new volunteer plants every day. It's hard to weed them out sometimes--their audacity makes me want to offer them a fighting chance, though we can't possibly accommodate them all. Even in the act of weeding out these resilient plants, I find a meditation of hope and wonder--these seeds were tossed aside. They were not cultivated, cared for, or watered by me. Despite my ignorance or neglect, and even from the deepest and longest darkness, common grace feeds and cares for them and so life persists.

The wonder of it all is all I can offer as an explanation for the incorrigible gardeners we have become. It draws us back to the labor of the dirt, and compels us to wonder bigger each year. It is a beautiful, forgiving joy. Even when we get lazy and fruit rots on the vine, they get tossed into the compost and we see them next year--hundreds of little tomatoes trying again. When things go awry (read: squash bugs and crows), it's a reminder of how much is out of our control and that this is a good thing. We may not control

the birds of the air, but the resilience of nature is also not our responsibility. We have the calling and the pleasure of showing up to our lives each day, but also the comfort of endless grace when we fall from the tightrope we walk. Like volunteers from the compost bin, we are supported by common grace: this wonder, and many awaiting discovery, is what draws us again and again to the garden.





the Abbey

meet the ABBHEY DIRECTOR

Some may suggest that the days in which we now live cast a rather long shadow. In addition to the much-discussed ailments of our present age, we live in an increasingly secularized, post-Christian world. Such cultural changes have not been sudden but have been building for many years. CS Lewis wrote eight decades ago that the West had already become a post-Christian world and society was creating “men without chests,” that “In a sort of ghastly simplicity we remove the organ [the heart] and demand the function. We make men without chests and expect of them virtue and enterprise. We laugh at honor and are shocked to find traitors in our midst. We castrate and bid the geldings be fruitful.”¹

Lewis described a culture that asks for virtue while producing the opposing vice, and the relativism of his day has continued to increase markedly since, where the idea that there is no absolute truth has led to the decay of morality and lack of virtue: “men without chests.” We know that the only remedy for our sunken chests is Jesus Christ and we must proclaim His Gospel from the mountaintops and in every way we are called to do so, both as individuals and “the church.” But for those who pessimistically bemoan that our days are so dismal should be reminded that Satan has been alive and well long before this present age and there has always been competition between good and evil. In fact, it might be argued that the 21st century is quite similar to the time of Judges over 3,000 years ago (“*In those days there was no king in Israel. Everyone did what was right in his own eyes*”²), and remarkably like the 1st century AD, the time of the New Testament church. Indeed, there is nothing new under the sun.

The 1st Century church, as well as later in the Middle Ages, saw parish (church) ministry as a way to spiritually form both new and mature believers, while also establishing parallel but separate missionary outreach ministries to serve their respective communities both locally and abroad, spread the Gospel, and to be ambassadors for Christ in a fallen world. In the European medieval church this

was done largely through the monasteries, including their missionary outreach. We have that opportunity today at Church of the Redeemer, with our--unique today but not unique to the historic church mission--Parish, Park, Farm, Abbey quadrivium as separate yet parallel and united ways to minister to the greater community. As our post-Christian secularism and gnosticism increase, we should be vigorous equally to prayerfully solicit the help of the Holy Spirit in the spiritual formation of our church members and visitors in our Parish, while also providing outreach beyond the confines of the church proper with our Abbey. While the Parish focuses inward on discipleship and fostering spiritual formation, the Abbey is an extension of the church, a connected entity looking outward rather than inward, seeking to minister to the last, the least, and the lost. The Abbey frees the church to focus on the Parish while the Abbey looks outward with a focus on the greater Greensboro and worldwide community. Our pastors can focus on being spiritual leaders to shepherd their flock while the Abbey can extend our reach further with an assortment of para-church ministries to reach a wider audience.

The Abbey director will be the champion of the Abbey ministries, encouraging, supporting, and loving well the leaders of our growing ministries, as well as serve as a liaison between the Abbey and the Parish. With Alan now our bishop, COTR will increasingly become the center of our diocesan life, and concurrently the ministries of the Abbey can continue to expand. The Abbey is the “arm” of what the Parish does, and in our increasingly needy, post-Christian culture, this Abbey arm becomes a vital ministry of the church. We already have active Abbey ministries, including New Wineskins, Combat Female Veterans Families United, the Friends of Gahini partnership ministry in Rwanda, and Molly Mac, among others. We would like to see these ministries flourish even more and for others to be offered, with an Abbey director to encourage and support these thriving ministries in ways the pastoral staff doesn’t have the bandwidth to do.



from army and army reserve officer to history teacher, coach, and for twenty-five years, educational administrator. I served the past two decades as Head of School at two private, Christian classical schools in Roanoke, VA and here in Greensboro, working in ministry as an educator, have served on more than a dozen boards of Christian and secular organizations, including para-church ministries, schools, and churches, and have been called to serve in various leadership positions for nearly all of my four decades of working life. I completed two bachelor's degrees (BS, Wake Forest University; BA, Oregon State University) and two master's (MS, University of South Carolina; MA, College of William & Mary), and transitioned in the summer of 2020 from Head of School at Caldwell Academy to doing consulting work with school leaders and boards, along with writing a book, and will balance this new venture of serving the Lord as Abbey director part-time with these other part-time activities.

I pray for the Holy Spirit to use the Abbey to expand His Kingdom to all corners of Greensboro, (and the world!). Rather than a society that increasingly produces men and women “without chests,” we desire to proclaim the Gospel of Jesus Christ in various and far-reaching ways so that “chests” will grow as hearts are turned towards Him.

by Sam Cox

I have been invited to assume the role of Abbey director, starting slowly this coming fall and gradually expanding the role over the next couple of years. My career has taken me across various paths,

1 C.S. Lewis, *The Abolition of Man*, 1943.
2 Judges 21:25



Mission Offering Update

As a church, our mission statement is “Following Jesus as a worshipping, missional community of faith.” Although we have had a rough year, we have also been extremely blessed, and we take seriously Christ’s admonishment that “It is more blessed to give than receive” (Acts 20:35). At the end of March, our Vestry approved a Special Missions Offering, focusing both on local needs and the needs of our brothers and sisters in Rwanda.

Locally, we recognize the continuing need for the provision of good, nutritious food for those who do not have access. We were blessed with a grant from Guilford County last year that enabled us to put on a free farmers market, and we would love to be able to make this endeavor a sustainable, ongoing part of our mission as a church. It is the perfect, God-ordained blend of providing tangible needs, providing space for prayer and invitations to learn more about faith (via the Alpha course), supporting other local farmers and ministries, and making excellent use of the team, land, and vision that God has given to New Garden Park. We will be able to offer an 8-week free farmer’s market this fall, running Saturdays from October 2 to November 20, continuing this mission. Half of

the funds from this special offering are what enable us to do this, and we are thrilled to see how God continues to provide.

In Rwanda, where we have a sister parish in Karangazi that we share an ongoing relationship with, the country has been shut down in a much more strict and limiting way than in the U.S., and without the types of payroll protection loans, stimulus checks, and governmental help that we have received here. While they have had an extremely low number of cases and deaths, the economic impact has been crippling to many. In speaking with our friends and leaders there, we realized that the very things we have been blessed with here could enable us to provide a great level of relief for them, and we are doing just that.

Thanks to a generous matching gift, we are thrilled that you all have raised the full \$70,000, which fully funds both of these missions! THANK YOU for your generosity and heart for blessing others!

by Jessie Meriwether

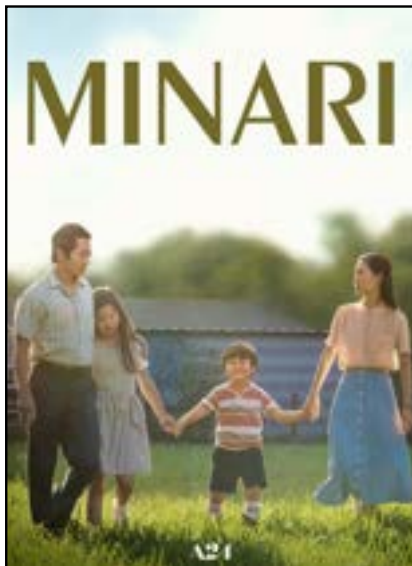
seedling sale

On Saturday April 24, the Farm at New Garden Park opened its doors to the Triad community for our first ever seedling sale! The farm team worked hard to seed, grow, and pot about 5,000 plants for the sale. The vision for the sale was to support local gardeners and homesteaders in their efforts to grow their own food, cultivate beautiful places, and create pollinator habitats. The farm selected seed varieties that are not available in big box stores: many varieties were heirlooms or ones that perform well in our Southeastern climate. The timing for the sale was providential; there were many seed shortages this growing season, and so we were glad to be able to grow seedlings for our local community that would have been particularly hard to find this year. The farm was blessed too, as this sale earned our ministry \$2800!



REEL WORLD REVIEW

by Mikey Fissel



MINARI IS ONE OF THOSE MOVIES that I heard being talked about as a possible “Best Picture contender” well before its release (it would, in fact, go on to be nominated for an Oscar for Best Picture). Though sometimes film hype gets a little out of hand, the closer and closer I came to seeing it, the more and more excited I let myself get. It is an odd feeling of expectation to finally sit down to a film you think could be the best thing you see all year long.

It was not the best thing I saw all year long.

Minari is the story of a Korean family, the Yis, who move to Arkansas in the 1980s to a small trailer on a sizable piece of land. The dream of Jacob, the father, is that they will be afforded a better life than they



Reel World Theology

It is our hope that by examining the entertainment that is prevalent in our culture, we may better understand and engage the narratives that are shaping it, being aware that story is powerful and entertainment is not mindless.

had before by growing Korean vegetables to sell to the thousands of Koreans immigrating to the U.S. He hopes this new venture will allow him to provide well for his wife, Monica, and their American-born children Anne and David.

Things do not always go according to plan, however. Water is hard to find for the crops; their son has a medical condition, and they no longer live close to any hospitals; they are isolated from nearly any other Korean community, and Monica is disillusioned with their move, demanding that her aging mother move from Korea to live with them. When Monica’s mother, Soonja, arrives, she does so to a family that is struggling both externally and internally.

Though I cannot say it is the best thing I saw all year, *Minari* was very good, and is one of the films that I have thought about the most while having incredibly interesting conversations about culture, hope, love, kindness, and expectations throughout the year. I believe my own expectations blinded me to the richness at the heart of *Minari*, yet it still was able to thrive in my mind despite my immediate impressions. That same perseverance is a theme of this film, seen in the resilience of the family and mirrored by the proliferation of the herb Soonja plants on their land (called by the name *minari* in Korean). It’s a beautiful film about missed opportunity and expectation that culminates in an endearing story of perseverance and family and should be one of the few 2020 films you don’t miss.

The Bible and Ecology: Rediscovering the Community of Creation by Richard Bauckham

MY FIRST READING OF THIS BOOK was like arriving late to a party thrown by academics for academics: I’d missed the introductions (who are these people?) and the backstories (why does he hold that position?). Confused and feeling like I was eavesdropping on a conversation where sides have been taken and lines drawn, I felt a bit peeved.

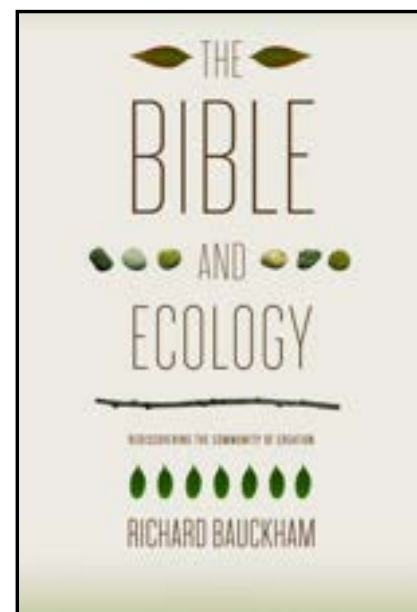
So I fumed, talked, prayed, and took another stab at it by reading the book a second time, depending heavily on the footnotes to understand the issues Bauckham refers to but does not elaborate. Fortunately, he clearly states his purpose at the beginning of each chapter, underscoring that the hubris of human dominion over creation must be corrected to a humble stance of being part of the “community of the created” in order to prevent further disaster that will be wrought by arrogant use of bio- and geo-engineering on top of growing global consumer materialism.

His solution is for believers to read Genesis 1 in the context of other great creation passages: Job 38-41, Psalm 104 and others, the “do not be anxious” teaching of Jesus in Matthew, the “judgment upon the land” passages of the Old Testament, and culminates with the cosmic Christ presented in the great hymn of Colossians 1 and the prologue to the gospel of John.

Walking through these passages I thoroughly enjoyed, and though I may have not kept up with the nuances of the debate regarding environmental destruction, my heart responds to worship of Christ as creator, and reaps the benefits of the soul-calibration that brings. I am encouraged to listen, read, pray, obey, and wait with faith and hope for Christ to return.

THE BOOK N

O O K



reviewed by Andrea Morgan



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