

Hope for a Bumper Crop

 **God prepares the soil. (vv.1-9)**

 **God makes the garden grow. (vv.18-23)**

In the name of Jesus, the Caretaker of our souls, dearly redeemed:

My Dad was big on summer jobs. We seven children often heard that “idleness is the devil’s workshop.” So twenty minutes in the garden every day weeding was a must. And, oh, what a long twenty minutes that was – until my brother and I discovered irrigation. Since all we had was a hose, it meant flood irrigation with dams and ditches which passed the time much faster than weeding. It was much more fun in the sandy soil out West than my bout with sun stroke trying to chop weeds out of our garden in Prairie du Chien, Wisconsin. I should have done a little irrigating before hoeing that hard Midwest clay. It’s so much like life when you’re either spinning your wheels or overworking whatever.

Did you ever stop to think that you are God’s garden? Do you, like God, **Hope for a Bumper Crop**? It will never happen if you’re busy “pitchy-potching,” as my Mom called playing in the mud. But, let’s face it. Sometimes we Christians try way too hard and sun-stroke our souls. Remember...

 **God prepares the soil. (vv.1-9)**

One of the things I admire most about God’s Son, our Savior, is His unmatched ability to teach. No matter what the circumstances, Jesus kept living up to His reputation as the Word of God Incarnate. When the crowds were pressing Him hard against the shoreline, Jesus **“got into a boat and sat in it, while all the people stood on the shore.”** You know how sound carries across the water. Try it sometime up at the lake. Row out a few hundred yards with your Bible and start preaching to the people on shore. Even without the jet skis to drown Him out, I doubt it was any less strange then than it would be today if you tried at your cabin. But Jesus had a job to do. He knows for sure **God prepares the soil.**

The soil of every human heart needs preparation from the start. Even Jesus’ own mother and brothers had a hard, rocky problem with His ministry where they thought He had lost His mind. (Mark 3:21) In the previous chapter they were coming to take Jesus away when He replied to the crowds inside: **“Whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother.”** (Matthew 12:50) And what is God’s will? **“Whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned; he has crossed over from death to life.”** (John 5:24) We’re not just talking about a vegetable garden here, are we? **God prepares the soil** of our hearts as a matter of life and death.

Picture **“the seed”** of God’s Word, broadcast by the Master Teacher. This is so vivid that even if you haven’t got a green thumb on either hand, it’s still clear. Some seed falls on the hard trodden foot path, and bam! Birds are on it like – birds on seed. Not much better for the seed on stony ground. Sure, it sprouts, but the blasted wind on the shallow roots leaves a wisp of nothing for the farmer. And where are those tender plants under all the Canadian thistle and Mullen and dandelions which reach the sunshine whether it rains or not? We’ve lost some of the picture with our hybrids and herbicides. But plant a garden of your own, and you know the sweat that goes into a **Bumper Crop** long before the seeds even touch the soil. It takes a ton of preparation. And **the soil** of our souls God alone can prepare.

 **God makes the garden grow. (vv.18-23)**

That’s why it was such a thrill to find a garden out back of our home in Prairie du Chien. Joel was just a baby with sister Katie on the way. Kind hearted faculty from our former WELS Martin Luther Preparatory School had the garden all planted and ready when we moved in. It was good food on our little table. And when an inexperienced neighbor found the kitty-corner lot he’d plowed was too much for

his first garden, he let me start planting from my end as much as I wanted. Again, someone else did all the soil prep. Should have been nothing but **Bumper Crop**, right? The first planting of corn sure was. But before it came in, I did a second planting where I really worked at it – setting the seeds just right, mounding the dirt, carrying water . All my effort should have made a much, much better harvest of corn. But such was not to be! Not one ear came off my second, hard work planting. But the easy first one, for which I had no hope at all...? Beautiful, full ears of corn because **God makes the garden grow**.

Have you reached the point in your spiritual journey to maturity that you truly **Hope for a Bumper Crop** with God? What a way to grow and go if you can plant one seed to get thirty, sixty or a hundred times what was sown! But you'll never make it happen by worrying about your faith. You can ring tears from your eyes every night for your sins and not find one more kernel of corn on your faith. But that's why Jesus invites us, "*Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.*" It's like saying, "Let me **make the garden grow**."

And while some of us suffer from guilty fears, most people have the opposite problem. In fact, it's so pervasive that Jesus paints three different pictures to help us understand. Where do you fit in?

Is your heart so hard that you really don't care when God's Word is preached? Does nothing ever get through to you? Has all the business of your life trampled you down so hard inside your heart is like a footpath for a thousand feet? Maybe you come to church once in a while, but nothing sinks in because the seed falls on concrete sidewalks and driveways always leading somewhere else. Children wishing church was done, or business owners thinking how to make more money, or lovely ladies with wonderful relationships – do all these blessings make your heart too hard for God's Good News?

"No, no!" you cry. God's Word excites me! Like the man who rushed up after a service in Snail Lake School, ready to jump in and help with everything. We never saw him again. God only knows for sure, but did the seed of God's Word fall on rocky soil where the quick plant with shallow roots had no hold? Did lack of moisture in hard times dry up the man's faith? Can you relate?

Or do you find yourself on the other side of prosperity in one big field of green? You can't sleep at night worrying about your investments, or your "golden years" in failing health. Your beautiful dream home shouts, "Success!" but is it filled with water-sucking, soul-destroying, faith-choking weeds? How will we in the "land of the free and home of the brave" keep from getting all choked up on wealth?

In a few minutes we will sing, "The power is yours alone to make it spring and grow." (CW 322:1) Good works are like the flowers in a garden. The flowers do not make the garden grow, any more than your good works can save you. But look at those bursting blooms. Don't they show what a great garden it is? And don't your good works prove God's wonderful work in your heart and life? God planted the seed when you were baptized in Jesus' Name. That's the waterline that connects you to Jesus' holy life. He always listened to God's Word. As a teenager, Jesus went eagerly to church. Every Word was a treasure to Him. No hard heart in Jesus, no shallow roots in rocky soil or worldly weeds to choke His faith in God. God says all His holy life counts for you. His shed blood washes away every moment of hard unbelief, rocky enthusiasm or thorny materialism. He sends His dear Holy Spirit through His Word to soften the soil, clear the rocks, pull the weeds and plant the seed which He continually waters with Word and sacrament. For we are by grace the garden of God's delight. He loves spending time with you as you enjoy a fragrant flower garden. Every garden is a miracle of the Creator. And your soul so much the more, for there God lives and loves and grows His **Bumper Crop** of faith and hope and love. Bloom where you are planted in Jesus' holy Name. Amen.