

Column – God and gardening shops

Is it my imagination, or do people tend to be less grumpy and more convivial outside? I am thinking particularly of gardening centers in the springtime.

Striking up a conversation is easy, even expected while examining varieties of pepper plants. One person says, “I tried to grow those red ones last year, and mine didn’t do a darn. Too much rain, I suspect.” Another adds, “I grew those California ones, and we had so many that we got tired of stuff bell peppers for supper. Don’t plant too many.”

A third person overhearing the conversation chimes in, “Stick to the banana peppers, and you will have more than you can give away. Try putting them in salads.” And so, the conversation continues.

Such venues are not only places of conversation; they are venues of hope. Everyone, whether he is buying seed, bedding plants, or flowering baskets and potted hibiscus for his ‘Florida’ deck, has high expectations. The best is yet to come.

Go back to the same venue, let's say in late October or early November, and that buoyant spirit may not be present. The aisles which in spring were filled with exotic tropical plants and flowers appear drab and with very few people strolling down them.

Life might be compared with the cycle of the seasons. From adolescence onward into young adulthood, life lies before you. You are like those people queuing up at the till with their bedding plants and yellow bags of Black Cow, eager to get home and to get to work. This is a season of great expectation, hopes and plans.

Middle adulthood might be compared to the growing season of summer. Some of your 'plants' (plans) come to fruition; others do not. This is the season of hard work. In it there are both successes and disappointments.

Finally comes the older years, corresponding to autumn, the season in which the aisles in garden shops are largely bare. Those things planted in spring have been spent. Two possibilities emerge in the larger picture of life. Autumn years can be a time

of stored cupboards and happy memories or a time of regret and impending doom.

The prophet Jeremiah captures the pathos of the latter when he says: “The harvest is past, the summer is ended, and we are not saved” (8:20). In context, the picture is of the Southern Kingdom of Judah to which God has sent many opportunities for return and rescue. Yet, the people have said no and have persisted in their waywardness and idolatry. Now a time of reckoning has come, as armies of a fierce people steadily advance.

What is the answer? How can the abundant life that Jesus came to bring be secured? The answer is found in a single word, “today.” “Today, if you will hear his voice, harden not your heart” (Hebrews 3:7,8). Delay is dangerous.

Learn a lesson from the garden shop. While it is today, dream big in springtime; labor for the Master in summer; and end well in autumn.

*O GOD, the King of glory, who hast exalted
thine only Son Jesus Christ with great triumph unto*

thy kingdom in heaven; We beseech thee, leave us not comfortless; but send to us thine Holy Ghost to comfort us, and exalt us unto the same place whither our Saviour Christ is gone before, who liveth and reigneth with thee and the Holy Ghost, one God, world without end. Amen. (Collect for the Sunday after Ascension, Book of Common Prayer)

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