

Column – The Ripe Fruits in the Garden

It's that time of the year. Summer is in full swing. Fields of corn can be seen growing along highways. Roadside vegetable stands are open for business. Home gardens are producing at times more vegetables than needed for the table. The over-plus is being canned and frozen.

Summer is not only a time for growing, harvesting and putting up the fruits of the earth for winter but also for sharing. One of the funniest things I have heard was a woman say: "You better lock your car when you go into town. If you don't, you might well come back and find a bag of zucchini on the back seat." What makes this statement funny is that it is true!

Sharing was certainly the way of life when I was growing up. On our place, we had three or four fig trees. On good years, the fruit would be so abundant that we would have to call neighbors to come and take what they needed. One of our most prolific trees was where the barn and chicken yard came together.

My job was to climb onto the barn's shed roof and fill molasses buckets with figs and send them down . . . again, often for people we had called.

Meanwhile, the over-ripe figs that fell when limbs shook were not lost. No, one or more fat hens were waiting below to gobble them up almost before they hit the ground.

My mother would take those figs that we kept for ourselves and turn them into fig preserves, often with a slice of lemon in the pot. She would do the same with pears and peaches (without the lemon). Whatever the fruit, it would later be put on buttered biscuits. Great memories!

The English hymnwriter Cecil Frances Alexander turns what might appear to be ordinary and mundane – tomato plants dripping with ripening fruit, people pulled over buying corn at a roadside stand, pots on the stove full of figs with mason jars standing off to the side – and turns those scenes into worship and praise to the God who reigns above. In the third stanza of “All things bright and beautiful,” she highlights the blessings of the seasons in these words: “The cold wind in the winter, / The pleasant

summer sun, / The ripe fruit in the garden, / He
[God] made them every one.”

In the stanza that follows, she concludes by saying: “He gave us eyes to see them, / And lips that we may tell / How great is God Almighty, / Who has made all things well.

Gerard Manley Hopkins’ well-known words -- “The world is charged with the grandeur of God” – are true, but we must have open eyes and hearts to see this grandeur. The nitty-gritty tasks of life must not be allowed to get in the way and blind us.

And yes, we must have lips to tell. Whom will you tell this week how great is God Almighty?

O HEAVENLY Father, who hast filled the world with beauty; Open, we beseech thee, our eyes to behold thy gracious hand in all thy works; that rejoicing in thy whole creation, we may learn to serve thee with gladness; for the sake of him by whom all things were made, thy Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen. (Book of Common Prayer)

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