

Column

Along country lanes it is not uncommon to come upon an old home site. The house may be gone, but there are telltale signs that once a family lived there. The most enduring of these are rows of bulbs such as irises, narcissuses and jonquils. You might also find an odd shrub here or there along with the casement to a long abandoned well or cistern.

I am thinking of one particular homesite I came upon 40 or so years ago. Here were not only the usual bulbs but also periwinkle, a low-growing plant with blue flowers, covering the ground. I stopped and dug some up and replanted them where I was living at the time.

Sites such as this suggest at least two things. The first is that this present age lacks permanence. In the words of the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews, “Here we have no continuing city.” The things we lovingly care for and busy ourselves about are passing away. The family who made their home on the site I have just described – I am imagining now – probably never thought about their secure dwelling

and surrounding gardens going away. It was their patch of earth where they made their home. It was to them a place of tranquillity and security.

The moral here is: Don't get too comfortable in this borrowed field. This present age is one of change and decay. The verse I have just quoted does not end with "Here we have no continuing city." Rather, the writer adds "we seek one to come," which brings me to my second thought.

The things of this present age are not permanent. Like the water in a waterfall, they are always changing. But they do point us forward to another age and a more secure 'city', one whose builder and maker is God. Hence, we do right in planting flowers, beautifying the patch of earth God has given us. Our earthly habitations should be places of beauty, love and hospitality, havens of blessing and peace.

Even so, as we dig and plant and go about our daily business, we do so in anticipation of a better, more secure home. We look forward to the arrival the Kingdom of God in its fulness, to a time when

all will be made new and God will wipe away all tears. The element of transitoriness, which at the moment seems just to be the way things are, will be removed.

The good news is that in the interim we can live confident, meaningful lives. We know that what we do in the present will count. The Apostle Paul tells us as much when he writes in 1 Corinthians 15:58: “Be ye steadfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord” (1 Corinthians 15:58).

Viewed like this, every shrub and bulb we view and plant brings us closer to the Kingdom. Our present home, instead of being a destination, becomes a signpost pointing forward to something better. So let us live in hope and expectation.

O GOD, who hast prepared for those who love thee such good things as pass man's understanding; Pour into our hearts such love toward thee, that we, loving thee above all things, may obtain thy promises, which exceed all that we can desire;

through Jesus Christ our Lord, Amen. (Collect for the Sixth Sunday after Trinity, the Book of Common Prayer)

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