

Karen Hollis
February 26, 2020
Ash Wednesday
Fertilizer

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of all our hearts
be reflections of your word to us this morning, in Christ Jesus we
pray, Amen.

Lift voice

There is a documentary on Netflix called The Biggest Little Farm that chronicles a young couple in their first 7 years of farming using what they call traditional farming practices. They wanted to farm in harmony with nature. They bought 200 acres of previously farmed, dead land just north of Los Angeles. Their farming mentor helped them rip out many of the old trees and non-native species, lots of weeds, and convinced them to build a state of the art worm composting facility to feed the soil. Then they brought in a huge diversity of plants and animals, because biodiversity mimics nature. The farm seemed overly complicated at first, with so many varieties of things to keep up with, but they had put the fly wheel in motion, the self-perpetuating circle full of life: all the plants, wildlife, livestock, compost and humans were working together, pushing forward,

building the health of the once dead and hard soil, and learning how to work together in harmony.

When their mentor had them plant cover crops on the farm, they worried they needed to hire more people to mow it all, but he helped them see how the cover was food for the animals. The sheep would graze the cover crops in different parts of the farm, trampling it down and leaving their droppings behind to fertilize the soil. The cover crops brought pests and rodents, but simultaneously the improving soil health was creating habitat for predators, from ladybugs eating aphids, to hawks and owls and snakes eating the rodents. It took time and patience . . . and faith in the wisdom of nature, but the farm began to find balance.

As life cycled through the seasons on the farm, the couple noticed a 5th season they called Lent. Extreme weather would come to the land, already stressed in places by drought. Winds whipped through, exposing the fragility of life, and huge rainstorms dumped water on the parched land. Lent is the season in which they cannot hide; they are exposed to the unpredictability of life, that which they cannot control, and the power of

nature. It is the season that strips them down and exposes truth about who they are, about what they have become. There is death in the harshness of the storm, but that death is a part of life. The young farmers found that while neighbour farms had rivers of water wash off the land into the sea, the farm built in harmony with nature was able to absorb all of that water and store the excess in the aquifer, largely from the help of those cover crops.

As the young farmers added fertilizer and biodiversity to the once dead and dry land, over time a process billions of years old awakened, and microorganisms returned to the soil.

Microorganisms are purpose driven organisms alchemizing death to life. Everything that dies gets broken down into minerals and nutrients to feed plants. The farm is energized entirely by the impermanence of life. The earth too is energized by the impermanence of life.

In some places in BC you can still look up and see the Milky Way; we can see it out there, but we are also a part of it. We spin inside this vast galaxy full of gas and dust, death and life. In the same way we are one with the cycle of death and life here on earth. Not only is death a part of life . . . life

is dependant on death and the microscopic process that turns the wheel of transformation. It's human to resist death, and grieve death . . . but it also feels comforting to be part of something, to be held by something so much greater than ourselves. You come from dust . . . and to dust you shall return.

~ Written with the help of "The Biggest Little Farm," viewed on Netflix.