

*Wednesday June 4, 2014*

## **Weeding as a form of meditation**

**By Jim Taylor**

**Rather to my surprise, I have become our family's primary gardener. For years, I thought gardening was my wife's job. I did the manly things – pruning unruly branches, digging out rocks, mowing lawns, repairing equipment. She did the planning, the weeding, the dead-heading...**

**But her chronic leukemia leaves her short of energy. It dawned on me – sometime last summer – that if our garden was going to be maintained, I was going to have to do most of it.**

**And you know something? I quite enjoy it.**

**I get a sense of pride, of course, when azaleas explode like fireworks into multi-coloured crescendos of blossom. When lavender clumps become bee magnets. When oriental lilies trumpet their fanfare of praise at the skies.**

**There's a sense of satisfaction, in organizing all those shades and textures into something beautiful. Also a sense of humility, in knowing that nothing I can do will ever make a seed germinate.**

### **Like a mantra**

**But there are pleasures in the more mundane tasks, too.**

**A gardener friend describes weeding as "a form of meditation." I used to hate weeding. It seemed so mindless. But I think she's right – partly because weeding is mindless. You have to empty your mind of the Shriner's parade of random thoughts that normally romp through your neurons, and focus only on the task before you.**

**The weeds themselves are as hypnotic as a Tibetan mantra. Each seedling requires your undivided attention; if your mind wanders, you'll miss one. Like beads on a rosary, each weed leads to the next, to the next, to the next...**

**Hours pass. When I look back along the bed, I can see that I have accomplished something. But my mind has been focused on task, not on destination. The simple act of doing matters more than how far I get.**

**My mother used to quote a British author who said something like,**

**“There’s more honest prayer done on one’s knees in a garden than in all the churches of England.” I wish I could recall the quotation accurately. Perhaps someone can send me the correct wording.**

**Neither prayer nor weeding, I realize, works when performed sporadically – only when things get out of control. Both disciplines require regular practice. Ignore either of them for too long, and you don’t know where to start.**

## **Bringing out the best**

**It even occurs to me, sometimes, that my past and present vocations have a lot in common.**

**If writing is like creating a beautiful garden, as someone once said, then weeding is like editing. It took me years to realize that editing doesn’t consist of rewriting someone else’s prose, but of identifying the prize blossoms in a writer’s text and pulling out everything that obscures their beauty.**

**I can’t say that I always enjoy gardening. Especially when wet branches drip icy showers down my neck. Gardens can also be jealous lovers. They don’t seem to understand that I may also have other commitments.**

**I’m still learning my spireas from my weigalias. I still have to ask whether this is an allium or an onion, when to plant dahlias, when to hill potatoes.**

**But I don’t resent the garden any more. We get along much better than we used to. We almost have a relationship.**

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## **YOUR TURN**

**Ted Spenser read last week’s column, in which I mused about the opening chapters of Genesis being preamble -- like the “whereas” clauses before the “Be it resolved” motion, and not text upon which doctrinal systems should be founded -- and wondered, “How many years ago would you, having said Those Things, be a candidate for roasting alive? Not too many. Last Sunday, our (UCC) minister agonized over speaking of Greta Vosper, fearing, even today,**

**that the utterance of anything even vaguely heretical would be cataclysmic. Well, it wasn't. Neither heretical nor cataclysmic. We, there, were brought closer to a time when our spiritual understanding will slide off the pillar of historical fiction, on to the pillar of present day truth. The sooner that move is complete, the sooner we will achieve humanity."**

**Frieda Hogg wrote, "I totally agree but I was never able to put it into the right words as you have done. Thank you!"**

**"For obvious reasons I love your theologically challenging columns," John McTavish wrote. "With respect to the latest one, I agree there's something pat about stories of The Fall when they're presented as necessary preludes to stories of redemption. But maybe, as your column itself indicates, it's really the other way around. First comes the redemption, the act of salvation or deliverance, and then the attempt to explain why such a saving act was necessary.**

**"First, Christ moves to the cross saying things like, 'Now is my soul troubled; ...but for this cause came I unto this hour.'" (John 12:27) Later comes the theological grappling concerning the need for salvation in the wake of the redemptive event itself.**

**"The same in the Old Testament. First, Exodus reports the providential escape of the Jewish people from Egypt, and then come the grapplings in the Genesis stories probing the nature of the deliverance -- and its promise.**

**"Lots of mistakes are made (in the Bible itself not to mention beyond) in trying to understand the prequel to the saving events described in the Bible. Yet surely the attempt must be made or those saving events leave us wondering, 'Saved from what -- and why?'"**

**Rich Hendricks (I think this is his first letter) recalled taking "Old Testament from Professor Hayes at Candler School of Theology, Emory University. He was Jewish and told us that the notion of the Fall was clearly understood by the Jews as story [not fact]. I believe I learned in New Testament Theology that the whole concept of Original Sin began with Irenaeus in the 2nd Century but was made into the awful concept as we know it by Augustine, around 400 CE or later. I have never understood how we let this man's twisted interpretations become Church doctrine when there is nothing of Jesus' teaching to suggest such a thing."**

**A few letters continued to come in, about the previous week's column on heaven.**

**Mary-Margaret Boone commented, "I am not a particular believer in heaven but at interment services I commonly say that I do believe that as Christians we are a resurrection people. We are an Easter people, that is what defines us. I live in an area where we cannot do winter burials, so after Easter I am burying people whose celebrations of life happened several months ago. I find myself thinking about what does heaven mean, and what does an afterlife mean? Heaven is something that we internally construct.... If we have any control over it, I just want to be a size 10 again!**

**"The hope for me is that as a Christian, the end is not the end -- some formless void that has no hope or future. Perhaps everyone's heaven will be of their making. Wouldn't that be wonderful"**

**Wayne Irwin added, "One of my favorite Gary Larson cartoons had a divided panel. The twin captions read, 'Welcome to Heaven -- here's your harp; Welcome to Hell -- here's your accordion.' If heaven is sitting all day on a cloud playing my harp, how long will that feel like bliss?"**

**Betty Robbins thought she had caught me in an error, when I wrote about "*a discussion group in our church going mortar and pistol at the issue of disarmament.*" As Betty noted, correct term is "mortar and pestle." But I thought I was being smart in recognizing that mortars are also military weapons, and punned with "pistol" instead of "Pestle." Well, I'm glad at least one person noticed...**

**Incidentally, I apologize if I have inadvertently missed any of your letters. My e-mail program has suddenly, without notice, started grouping conversational threads so that only the first record shows; the rest appear only if I remember to click on that initial item.**

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## **PSALM PARAPHRASES**

**Here comes Pentecost, the birthday of the organized church. When I look back, I see that I have sent you the same version of Psalm 104 for the last two**

years. So here's a variant.

**24 You made everything, God.**

**You imagine it, and it happens.**

**You breathe on it, and give it life.**

**25 Your oceans are the amniotic fluid of the earth.**

**In your womb we share our origins.**

**26 We like to think we look after ourselves**

**with trade and commerce;**

**with boats that plow the seas;**

**with trains and trucks and planes.**

**We braid the earth with busy-ness.**

**27 Yet everything owes its life to you;**

**Everything depends on you for life.**

**28 You bring forth food from the earth, from the seas, from the skies.**

**By your bounty all are fed.**

**29 If you withdraw your favor, we will all perish.**

**Without you, we are no more than a collection of chemicals,**

**30 But you put your breath of life into us;**

**With each new generation, you renew us.**

**31 Our living bodies reveal your spirit --**

**may our living be acceptable to you, Holy One.**

**32 You create the volcanos and the earthquakes, the hurricanes and glaciers;**

**You shape the earth itself.**

**33 Yet you care about us.**

**We are no more than ants and sparrows in your creation;**

**we are overwhelmed with gratitude.**

**34 This is our understanding--**

**may it meet with your approval.**

**For paraphrases of most of the psalms used by the RCL, you can order my book**  
***Everyday Psalms* from Wood Lake Publishing, [info@woodlake.com](mailto:info@woodlake.com).**

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YOU SCRATCH MY BACK...

If you know someone else who might like to receive this column regularly via e-mail, send a request to [jimt@quixotic.ca](mailto:jimt@quixotic.ca).

Or, if you wish, forward them a copy of this column. But please put your name on it, so they don't think I'm sending out spam.

For other web links worth pursuing, try

- Ralph Milton's HymnSight webpage, <http://www.hymnsight.ca>, with a vast gallery of photos you can use to enhance the appearance of the visual images you project for liturgical use (prayers, responses, hymn verses, etc.)
- David Keating's "SeemslkeGod" page, [www.seemslkegod.org](http://www.seemslkegod.org);
- Isobel Gibson's thoughtful and well-written blog, [www.traditionaliconoclast.com](http://www.traditionaliconoclast.com)
- Alan Reynold's weekly musings, punningly titled "Reynolds Rap," write [reynoldsrap@shaw.ca](mailto:reynoldsrap@shaw.ca)
- Wayne Irwin's "Churchweb Canada," an inexpensive service for any congregation wanting to develop a web presence, with free consultation. <http://www.churchwebcanada.ca>
- Alva Wood's satiric stories about incompetent bureaucrats and prejudiced attitudes in a small town are not particularly religious, but they are fun; write [alvawood@gmail.com](mailto:alvawood@gmail.com) to get onto her mailing list.

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#### TECHNICAL STUFF

If you want to comment on something, send a message directly to me, [jimt@quixotic.ca](mailto:jimt@quixotic.ca).

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You can access several years of archived columns at <http://edges.Canadahomepage.net>.

I write a second column each Sunday called Sharp Edges, which tends to be somewhat more cutting about social and justice issues. To sign up for Sharp Edges, write to me directly, at [jimt@quixotic.ca](mailto:jimt@quixotic.ca), or send a note to [sharpedges-subscribe@quixotic.ca](mailto:sharpedges-subscribe@quixotic.ca)

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