



“Farmer of Hope” by Lalo Garcia, used with permission

My son, Stanley, is out west somewhere in northern B.C. tree planting. From what I can tell, tree planting as a summer job is like being put in a Siberian penal camp — but with good pay and better food. It is brutal physical work.



As you know, the heat and drought conditions in B.C. mean that sometimes they are working in areas with smoke. Sometimes they have to work “forest fire hours” where they get up at 3 in the morning and work almost until noon, then sleep in the hottest time of the day.

I asked during one heat wave how he even sleeps in the heat and he said “Oh we don’t really.” Stanley says that sometimes when he sticks his shovel in ground, he hits an underground wasp nest — and is repeatedly stung while he carries on planting. They can’t listen to music or an audible book because they have to keep their ears open for bears and cougars. Just last week I read a news headline that said “tree planter airlifted to hospital after being mauled by bear”! It’s mentally challenging to do the same repetitive work in harsh conditions hour after hour, and you have to do it right or you have to redo it. You are paid per tree correctly planted. Depending on the type of soil he’s working in, he can plant between 200 and 500 trees a day. Trying to be positive, I said something about how it must feel good that he’s planted a tree that will grow. Stanley replied “Not really, we’re replanting some of the



places we planted 2 years ago that have since been destroyed by forest fires.” All that work up in flames.

At least the pay is decent ... but it's not my idea of a good time.

Jesus often taught the crowds using stories called parables. When Jesus was talking about human things, he usually spoke plainly. But when Jesus was speaking about the kingdom of God, he used parables. We just don't have language for the spirit world or the ways of God. It is hard for us to grasp kingdom ways. So Jesus uses a number of stories, parables, that basically have the formula “The kingdom of God is like...”

In this parable Jesus describes a farmer, a sower, who goes out to plant. He's not using fancy farming equipment to plant or even using a hoe in a careful line, dropping in one seed at a time. Instead he is scattering the seed. The farmer is probably planting something like wheat. Wheat seeds are tiny. It would be pretty much impossible to plant wheat seed one seed at a time — it's just too small.



Instead, you scatter it. As this farmer goes out, he scatters the seed and it falls in productive, fertile places and in crappy and unproductive places.

I don't know if the farmer has a really bad aim or if he is careless or if there are factors like strong wind that are beyond his control, but it seems like most of the seed ends up in useless locations: the road, on the rocks and in the thorns. It looks like most of his work is pointless and wasted. Most of that seed ends up in places that do absolutely nothing. Have you ever felt that what you are doing doesn't make much of a difference?

Maybe you feel like you used to be someone who was able to be productive and make a difference, but now because of age, health or energy your life feels not so significant. Or perhaps you work and spend a lot of time doing something that feels meaningless.

Last week we talked about vocation. We talked about discerning what we are uniquely called to do as people who follow Jesus. Often it's easier to see how someone else is making a difference than it is to see what we are doing that makes a difference.

Sometimes the big and important things of life just seem too big and overwhelming. Like what's a person to do about a war in Ukraine or the rising cost of food or the increase in mental illness and addiction? What are we to do as we see forest fires raging near James Bay in Waskaganish, Quebec, or in BC and feel the reality of what they've been warning us about for 30 years and more with climate change?

I'm reading a very interesting book called *Imaginable*. Jane McGonigal, the author, is a game designer and futurist. She has been using her skills as someone who designs large multi-player, cooperative and competitive simulation games to help people imagine and adapt to unimaginable futures. In 2010 she designed and ran one of these games in which a global respiratory pandemic emerged at the same time as raging wildfires and a major disinformation campaign. *2010!* The cool thing is not that she predicted the future — she imagines and plays with all sorts of potentially possible future scenarios— the cool thing is that she gets people to simulate living in these scenarios so she and the players can better understand the challenges they could face and therefore adapt and prepare far more quickly. A number of people who played her simulation game contacted her during the pandemic to say that, thanks to her, they felt far more prepared and less anxious. They already knew they were going to need masks and had thought about how to social distance. I like this one review of the book:

*“Imaginable is a delightful and actionable antidote to apocalypse: an invitation to play with the future as if it were limited by nothing but our own imaginative capacity.”*

—**Douglas Rushkoff, author of *Present Shock and Team Human***

What McGonigal wants people to imagine possible future scenarios so that they can better adapt and find small things that they can do in that future scenario or even now. This has the effect of making people feel more empowered. People who feel more empowered are more likely to take positive action.

At last Sunday evening's service, the speaker said that some people have a sense that what they do makes a difference — they feel empowered. Psychologists say these people have a strong '*internal locus of control*'. Others feel powerless, that nothing they do makes a difference. They are simply at the whim of outside factors like bad luck, bad bosses or larger systemic issues like racism or poverty. They have an '*external locus of control*'.

It's funny because being a Christian is a little bit different from either having an internal or external locus of control. We've got (or should have) a bit of both.

Jesus taught about the kingdom of God. He wasn't just giving a pep talk or trying to turn a pessimistic group of people into optimists. Remember that for Jesus, the kingdom of God is not just in the '*sweet by 'n by*' but here and now. Jesus was an in-breaking of God on earth — God-with-us. Jesus wanted to help people experience the kingdom of God *here and now*. The kingdom of God brings goodness, healing, life and beauty in small, simple, sometimes subversive or unassuming ways.

We who have tasted heaven — we who have experienced the Good News — are called to share and scatter these kingdom seeds. And so we scatter — we do small things, and sometimes we see the wonderful things that come out of it and sometimes

we don't. Like the farmer, no matter how careful we are, we still can't control a gust of wind that takes the seed and sends it where we don't think anything can grow. But in a way, that's not our business. Our business is to scatter goodness, love, hope, peace, joy, patience, forgiveness. Our business is to *do something*.

As Christians we remember that our job is to scatter, but it is God who is present to bring the growth! This is a wonderful partnership — a wonderful combination of we who need to do small, often limited things, and God who brings life in surprising ways. Just like Stanley can't worry about whether that area will succumb to wildfires. His only job is to plant a tree and plant it well.

Do you remember the poem "Anyway" attributed to Mother Teresa (written by Kent Keith)

*People are often unreasonable, illogical and self centered;  
Forgive them anyway.  
If you are kind, people may accuse you of selfish, ulterior motives;  
Be kind anyway.  
If you are successful, you will win some false friends and some true enemies;  
Succeed anyway.  
If you are honest and frank, people may cheat you;  
Be honest and frank anyway.  
What you spend years building, someone could destroy overnight;  
Build anyway.  
If you find serenity and happiness, they may be jealous;  
Be happy anyway.  
The good you do today, people will often forget tomorrow;  
Do good anyway.  
Give the world the best you have, and it may never be enough;  
Give the world the best you've got anyway.  
You see, in the final analysis, it is between you and your God;  
It was never between you and them anyway.*

Today I would add other larger things to the list:

- The damage done by racism and the residential school system is massive. Join the book study anyway.
- Climate change is here and too much for one person. Lobby for and use clean energy anyway.

We don't always get to see the good work we have done, but we are called to do it anyway. Our job is to plant. It is God's job to bring the life and the hope and the growth.

Last week I had an opportunity to see where a small action that we as a church took made a difference. Brockville has a new Islamic Center across from the YMCA. The building went through the process of changing the zoning for the building and Wall

Street wrote a letter of support which was read out at City Council meeting. At that meeting the leader of Brockville's Muslim community, Ahmad Khadra was present, and he was asked to tell the story about how they got to this point. Do you know what Ahmad talked about? He talked about us.

First he talked about how they used to meet and worship in homes, but with the Syrian refugee crisis and churches like ours sponsoring refugees to Brockville, their numbers were growing. Besides that, neighbours used to complain about parking when they met in homes. At one point someone with a yoga studio offered their place — but when they arrived the door was locked! So they just proceeded to lead prayers there at the back of the studio under a fire escape that was only used for emergencies. But the tenants above noticed and got upset.

Sometime around then Ahmad reported that I came to see him at his store and offered that we could probably host their group at our church if they needed space. He said that I toured him all around the church and showed him every room except my office! So for several years they used and worshiped in our building.

I thought it was very kind of Ahmad to give Wall Street so much credit for helping them on their journey, so I dropped by his store this past Monday to thank him. I said "Ahmad, thank you so much for saying what you said. I don't think I or the church deserves so much credit but thank you." Ahmad said: "I know, I know you are a person of faith and so you have to be humble, but you do deserve the credit!" And then he proceeded to tell me the story. Truth be told, I didn't even remember right away going to his store many years ago to offer space at the church. But as he told the story it jogged my memory. But that invitation and far more importantly the years they spent worshipping here seemed like not such a big deal to me. They were pretty tiny seeds in all that we do here at the church. But years later a community has been able to form and raise money and purchase their own building to call home. It wasn't a small thing for them. Our hospitality was critical. They were no longer afraid that neighbours would be upset or worse. It was only two years ago that a Muslim family was killed in an intentional hit-and-run in London Ontario. Anti-Muslim sentiment is high. and safe space was important.

It was really amazing to read the article and hear Ahmad tell it again to me. It was like God said, "See that small seed of hospitality that you barely even remember planting? It has born good fruit."

Do you remember the book review I liked? "*Imaginable is a delightful and actionable antidote to apocalypse.*" A relationship with Jesus is an even more delightful and actionable antidote to apocalypse, and to a world that feels overwhelming and beyond our control. We are not alone. So keep scattering good seed, because God makes the way.

Thanks be to God!