

As I was driving to work today, I began to notice signs of spring everywhere. Since I've given up my car radio for lent (that I might spend more time in prayer), I started to thank God for the seasons of the earth. Winter is nearly over and we will once again see the beauty of the earth all around us. You all know how much I love to garden so seeing signs of spring really makes me happy. That led me to think about the seasons of life.

So often I am asked why I celebrate lent. Lent is a time to prepare our souls so that we may fully enjoy the new life that was bought for us by the death and resurrection of our Lord. But what does it mean to prepare our souls??? I think it is interesting how Easter and Spring coincide - I doubt if it was accidental. I began to think of my soul as a garden. How do I prepare my garden for it's "new life" that comes in the spring? All winter long I look through seed catalogs and admire the beautiful plants that I would LOVE to have in my garden. I pour over all of my gardening books looking for something that will help me to make my garden more beautiful. But before I can really do anything of those things, I have to do the basic preparation and work.

First thing I do is clean out the dead stuff. It could be things I tried to grow, but just didn't work in the garden for some reason. Or maybe something that didn't make it over the long winter. What is dead stuff in our souls? Could it be disappointment in something/someone? Maybe it just wasn't meant to grow in my garden. Maybe my climate won't permit it. Maybe my garden is not yet fertile enough to help it flourish. Whatever it is, whenever I take it out there will be an empty place that will need a new plant. Will I try that plant that died again? How is my garden different this year than last? What would I like to plant in my garden? How about kindness, forgiveness, peace, hope, and LOVE.

Next, and this one is hard work...WEEDING. Weeding the garden is by far the most unenjoyable part of gardening. It is painful - I've had the cuts, blisters, and bruises to prove it. It is boring, hot, and lonely. But it MUST be done for a garden to truly be beautiful. Weeds will take over if not tended - they will strangle, crowd, or just plain kill the beautiful flowers I try so hard to grow. Weeding is never ending - weeds will always come back. I have a lot of weeds in my garden left over from last fall along with new ones that have just started popping up. So what are weeds in our souls? How about jealousy and pride (these seem to be some I'm dealing with lately). I was thinking this morning how jealousy has crept in my life lately like the Bermuda grass creeping in my garden. It starts just creeping along the border and before you know it, it has a foothold around my rises. If I don't do something, I will lose the beauty of my rises to the grass that will surround them. Each little stem sets roots and makes more stems. It is so hard to get rid of it once it gets a foothold. You have to really get "down and dirty" to try to get rid of it - and it always comes back. I have to be diligent in my war on Bermuda grass - much like my war on jealousy. I can never let my guard down. What about pride? I think this one might be tricky - maybe a weed that looks very pretty, but has a long, giant taproot that won't let go. You might think you get it all the root out, but that tiny little piece left way underground will come back again. Diligence. Everyone gets weeds in their gardens. There is no such thing as a perfect garden. Some of us deal with the same weeds, but we all have weeds specific to our gardens. I am thinking of lent as a time to weed my garden.

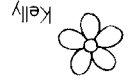
The third thing I'll do is fertilize my garden - much easier than a lot of the work in gardening. I want the soil in my garden to nourish the life and beauty that will hopefully grow in my garden. I was thinking that nourishing our souls could be as easy as listening to God's Word. Whether it be from the bible, from Church, a tape - however we can get it.

The last thing I will do to protect all of my hard work in the garden is to lay down a thick layer of mulch. We all know how important mulch is in the garden. Mulch helps to retain precious water, keeps the ground warm and cool during the harsh seasons of winter and summer, and it helps to control those pesky weeds. Could mulch be prayer? I will pray so that I will never thirst for the Lord, stay balanced during the harsh seasons, and keep the upper hand in "weed" control.

I am hoping for a glorious spring. Not just in my garden, but in my life. But I know my garden and my life will never be perfect. It is continual work. Even when we have tried our best to do all these things, we can be waylaid by a bad storm that will rip out plants, topple things over, spread the mulch all over the yard - it will seem to ruin our beautiful gardens. But after the storm, when I go outside to assess the damage, I am amazed at how resilient the plants in my garden are. They always come back - maybe not perfect at first - but with a little extra TLC they always come back. Once again I can see the beauty of life through the beauty of my garden.

I thank God for making himself real to me in this analogy. I pray that this might be meaningful to you in some way.

Wishing you peace, hope, and love in your garden.



3/6/10