

God is at Work in You Proper 21 A

“For it is God who is at work in you, enabling you both to will and to work for his good pleasure.” Phil. 2:13

God is always at work. Though he rested from his creation he has never rested nor removed himself from perfecting his creatures. God is at work in you and me even when we are unaware.

Deep into the San Bernadino Mountains near Running Spring, CA there is a garden some five acres in size. Bordering St. Ann's Catholic Church, one can park in the church's lot and visit the garden during peak bloom time in early March to early April.

A remarkable, breathtaking floral display greets visitors. More than five acres of mountain landscape are host to one million daffodils, accented by assorted other bulbs such as hyacinths, and tulips. Some of the flowers are in drifts that spill down the steep slopes; others stand in large beds. All were planted, one at a time, by one woman -- Gene Bauer. She started 47 years ago, inspired by a few daffodils in a neighbor's garden. Bauer planted 48 daffodils in

the fall of 1958. Needless to say, they thrived. Since then she's planted more daffodils each fall, but in the thousands. Some years, Bauer plants as few as 8,000 bulbs. In the fall of 1993, she planted 35,000. It's a kind of gardening zeal that makes the spring bulb ambitions of most of us seem rather paltry.

On the patio of her home, visitors can see a poster.

"Answers to the Questions I Know You Are Asking" is the headline. The first answer was a simple one: "50,000 bulbs," it reads. The second answer was, "One at a time, by one woman. Two hands, two feet and very little brain." The third answer was, "Began in 1958."

One mother reflected on her visit, "I thought of this woman whom I had never met, who, more than 40 years before, had begun - one bulb at a time - to bring her vision of beauty and joy to an obscure mountaintop. Still, just planting one bulb at a time, year after year, had changed the world. This unknown woman had forever changed the world in which she lived. She had created something of ineffable magnificence, beauty and inspiration.

The principle her daffodil garden taught is one of the greatest principles of celebration.

That is, learning to move toward our goals and desires one step at a time, often just one baby-step at a time - and learning to love the doing, learning to use the accumulation of time. When we multiply tiny pieces of time with small increments of daily effort, we, too, will find we can accomplish magnificent things. We can change the world.

"It makes me sad in a way," I admitted to my daughter. "What might I have accomplished if I had thought of a wonderful goal 35 or 40 years ago and had worked away at it 'one bulb at a time' through all those years? Just think what I might have been able to achieve!" My daughter summed up the message of the day in her usual direct way.

"Start tomorrow," she said.

"I'll start today," I said.

The Daffodil Principle of this story is a good one: Start today - one step at a time - to change your world.

If we focus on the daffodil, another, radically

different principle emerges: It is in dying that we gain life. Or, after every crucifixion, there's a resurrection. Or, in losing oneself, we truly find ourself.

Jesus made this point both in his teaching and in his life, as the Philippians text notes. In his teaching, he used a grain of wheat. He might have used a daffodil bulb. "Unless a [daffodil bulb] falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single [bulb]" (John 12:24).

In the Philippians text, the apostle Paul interprets Jesus' pre-existence, life and death in a similar manner. He showed that Christ plunged into human dirt, taking the form and likeness of humanity, and in that form died on the cross. God then exalted him and gave him a name above all other names. And with that life and that name he continues grow human seeds one life at a time.

What is Paul's point? "Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus" (2:5)."

Start today -one step at a time - to change your world. You may die a little in doing it. That's okay. Change and growth occur as the old is stripped away and the new is allowed to

emerge.

A woman living along a gravel road near a church, down a little path, spent her life creating something beautiful. In her case, it took several decades, 50,000 daffodil bulbs and the work of her hands and feet. But the impact of her efforts inspired countless people who wandered upon her garden to go and do likewise. Maybe they head out and plant their own daffodil bulbs. Or maybe they cultivate some other project with the capacity to bloom.

Jesus planted himself deep into human dirt and from that one life has blossomed countless seeds of life all over the world for thousands of years. Like Mrs. Bauer, who planted one bulb at a time, Jesus showed us how to plant one life at a time. He gives us human dirt to work with and tells us to go in faith and lives will change and people will grow and God's beauty will be known first in our church then in Janesville then who knows where? Amen