

Second Harvest
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Tadd and I are in our second year of very small scale production gardening, and the fourth summer in our house. Last year we dug up our front lawn and decided to build a big garden.** We were eating our own roasted tomatoes into the spring (thank you Lissa for your roasting and freezing suggestion fall) and our last winter squash in April or May. Last year when I reflected on the gardening process, it was an opportunity for exploring interconnectedness, for perseverance through challenges.** It was a struggle, but it felt more like this song than not [play John Denver clip]. This year, looking out at the garden, it has felt more like a security blanket.** Like we are investing our time and money now, for security later. And of course, many of you are farmers and gardeners and know that farming is not a secure kind of business. I grew up in a farming family**, and there were good years and bad years. In my experience, each year, you get a star veggie. Last year, our stars were tomatoes.** They are the fruit we have the most experience with, and Tadd looks after them so carefully, it made up for us losing all our cabbage and corn. This year we had plenty of cabbage, and are storing kimchi, and our squash and potatoes are crushing it. But tomatoes, oh tomatoes. Let me start at the beginning.

Going into this second year felt a lot different than last year. We had learned a lot in our first year of real gardening and were hoping to capitalize on that learning. We were a lot more organized out of the gate.** We kept better track of what we planted when, when it came up, and how things went. A big change in mindset for me is that much of what we are growing we are working to find ways to put up for the winter. We are of course eating a lot out of our garden, but maybe only 25% of what we grow. The rest we are trying to save, and working to get creative. We are slowly filling our deep-freeze and canning more, and yesterday I ordered a pasta maker for all the squash ravioli I want to freeze for winter..

We got this bookcase for Christmas**, to use as an indoor greenhouse since our cat would eat any starts he could get to.** It worked pretty well, but not as fast as we hoped, so** we added a grow light. Other improvements for this year were that we used more plastic to help with weed control, and it was a godsend.** Also, we bought a small tiller at the end of last year, which cut down on me falling and sobbing in the dirt, trying to turn this behemoth by hand.** We rented a truck and got yards of compost from a farm in Westhampton,** and got it spread** after the snow was finally gone.** We bought more hoses and sprinklers with the hope of being able to water all at once,** but we don't have enough water pressure, so we are still doing a lot of the watering with a hose, and had to do that a lot this summer because of our very rocky soil, and drought.

Our peas poked up on May 11.** We had our plan for the starts for tomatoes in our mini-greenhouse, but I made a mistake in the math and we started our tomatoes too late, and only had a couple starts out of 50 that were okay to plant when we needed them to be ready.** That said, we had dozens of volunteers in the beds, so Tadd moved them around, and then bought some starts to fill in the missing spots and get us up to 50 plants. We also tucked a couple in the back of the garden as an experiment.** We think that the blight came in on the starts. But, I will get to that later.

The potatoes came in beautifully and were a real confidence boost.** By the end of June, it looked like a garden.** **

But July had new surprises in store. Our first pest was new to me.** A relative of the Japanese beetle, but with furry antlers. It decimated our broccoli and Brussels, and we got none of them. It also started on the cabbage, carrots, and parsnips, but I read up and neem oiled the heck out of the garden,** bought some ladybugs to eat the aphids, and installed some solar lights with water underneath to catch beetles. We got the majority of beetles out of** the cabbage, carrots, and parsnips, which were their favorite, but we lost many plants on the way.

With pests in hand, we headed away for a week in mid-July.** And came home to things exploding, in a good way.** We had *all* the cucumbers, and started our first pickling and canning of the season.** Then there was a tropical storm.** ** Tadd trimmed up the tomatoes,** and discovered our next pest.** Tomato hornworms. They are a horror. They are apparently quite common, but I had never had the pleasure. They are so big, and yucky. And they can eat a plant in a couple of days. So more neem, and we bought more ladybugs, who apparently eat the hornworm larvae. We also discovered that we have many parasitic wasps, the good kind, that feast on hornworms, so eventually the hornworms were overcome.** And then came the blight.**

The blight battle we did not win,** we are only barely holding it back. We lost a lot of tomato plants and are nursing as many along as we can to try and get them to ripen. We also made two batches of green tomato catsup.** And we learned that our new irrigation system for the garden this summer relied too much on sprinkling water from above,** which spreads the blight. So, our task for year three is a new watering plan, rotating all the crops, and killing the blight. Losing the tomatoes has been sad. We are still getting some, and will have some to freeze and can, but not the couple hundred pounds we hoped for.

We did get way more melons than we expected,** and what a treat they were. All we had to do was eat them. I feel like they have been my salary from the garden for my work this summer. Also the four-year-old sunflower seed that we hoped might send up a few blooms, totally crushed it,** and we have been enjoying cut flowers all month. Oh, and we got corn.** It was a point of pride for Tadd. Last year we got no fruit at all, and so this year, we were bound and determined. Each stalk only gave us one ear, but I have three quart-size bags of corn in the deep freeze that I am going to eat in January, and have some summer corn in my soup. I am pumped for it. The corn this year is our \$50 tomato. I can't imagine how many gallons of water went into them.... Oh well. I thought that the peppers we had grown from starts were all going to fail,** but the jalapenos came through, and we will have a fair number. And we are now working on round two** in parts of the garden that have been harvested, a second round of greens, beans, and potatoes, much more productive than last year!** **

In addition to the concrete lessons about pest and blight management we learned this year, I also changed my frame of reference for what will work for maintaining the garden. I just build time into my schedule on most days that will be watering, weeding, picking, or processing, and that has helped me make plans.** But it took all the way until August for me to get a rhythm that worked. *And* I have cleaned my house maybe once this summer, I think before the cat sitter came in July? I sweep the kitchen every night because it is covered in garden dirt, do laundry, and that is all I can muster. We'll catch up eventually, or we won't.

So how does my attention to this garden help in a pandemic, or support smashing white supremacy culture, or the patriarchy?** [Close slides] The feeling that I had back in March of

not knowing if the food supply chain would hold up, and if we would have access to what we needed was scary, and if it was scary for me, with the means to work around challenges by spending more money on local food, including precious sacks of flour back in March, then what of most people? We have neighbors in our communities and congregation, and the wider world, who experience food and housing insecurity, each day, even without a pandemic and economic disaster. Do you remember March? It's okay if you don't. But if you do, think back to when you realized that the way that you live your life, your day to day was going to change, and with an indefinite endpoint. That didn't feel great. An informal pandemic victory garden movement has sprung up as people are home and thinking about food security. I hope an outcome of this time is that many are more closely connected to their food, the web of life, and with access to more veggies and the skills to grow them. I know that all these little gardens aren't likely to put a dent in big agribusiness practices, but they are certainly part of many things that will. For my own spiritual development, the experience of seeking control, realizing I have very little, and then making my way through, is practice for work in the world.

As I am digging in the rocks that are my garden, I also think about the agricultural and political history of where I live. I am in a hilltown, on former farmland, pasture. Most of the woods around me, and there are thousands of acres of them, are abandoned pastures that have grown up. There are stone walls and stone foundations all over these woods, largely from 1700s farming, when settlers claimed this land from the tribes still living in the area and started building small towns. These hills are crap for farming, the topsoil is full of rocks, and actually where my potatoes are, is literally rock that crumbled in my hands, plus compost. The land down in the Connecticut River Valley, the former Lake Hitchcock, is magnificent for farming, and so in the 1700s it was the poorer white folks, who couldn't afford that land, or to be closer to town, who eked out a living in the hills, which is true all down the Appalachian Mountain chain. But of course that living was eked out on the backs of the folks from whom the land was taken, and funded by an economy that was fueled by slave labor. So as I crumble the rocks into dirt and plant my potatoes, who seem to love that kind of soil by the way, I think about those hill folk, and how scared they must have been each year as they planted their potatoes. And I think about the people who hunted on this land for a thousand generations before that. I am grateful for my patch of rock.

As I am weeding, or planting, I sometimes also, think about nothing. I come closer to just being. What are the practices that ground you in your spiritual life and values? Even if it doesn't spring to mind right away, they are there. Take a moment and consider how your choices in the day to day are connected to your values. Maybe start small and think about what you ate yesterday, or what you did with your time. Why did you do what you did? How did your choices reflect your values? If they didn't, what was in the way? What connects you to all that is?

All the little things add up to the big ones. Which doesn't mean that there aren't big moments. We are living in one right now, when we are asked to show up for one another, to face huge challenges, to change and see the world differently, to work for justice and cultivate hope. How do you get ready for these big moments? For smashing of white supremacy culture and the patriarchy? This weekend has had more heartache and loss and violence against Black folks and protestors. I know that many of you are going to the standout in Pittsfield this afternoon at 1 p.m. for Jacob Blake, and I will be there online if it is streamed again. And then, I am going to go out and pick some vegetables, and stick my fingers in the dirt and remember that there is hope and beauty in simple things, and the responsibility I have for this land that I am living on. As

much as metaphor is part of my work in ministry, I have learned that I need physical work in order to really get things. I am the kind of person that sometimes struggles with learning something from a book, but can learn quickly when someone shows me how to do it. If I want to live my values in honoring my place in the web of life, live intentionally, if I want to honor the land on which my home sits and the traditions of my family, if I want to keep hopeful for a new path, and be ready to work for systemic change, then, this process, this dance between control and chaos that is gardening, is a way for me to get there. What is yours?

I will give Howard Thurman the last word:

I will lift up mine eyes. Scarcely knowing it, I have become increasingly self-centered, my mind focused upon all the details of my little life and the endless trivialities of a daily routine. I hover over all my little aches and pains, my petty annoyances, my little frustrations... Then out of no place comes sometimes a gentle, sometimes startling reminder and I lift up mine eyes... I will lift up mine eyes to life, that I may read the guideposts along my way and not miss the important turning in the road. I will lift up mine eyes to love, that I may not close the door of my heart to the knocking hand, the tender cry, the anxious reach.

So may it be. Amen