

Planting Our Dreams

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UCC, Cadillac, MI

Sara Keinath

Good morning; it's good to see we all survived the holiday season! It's a little funny that a season all about joy and celebration can be so exhausting. Maybe that's why there's such an interesting dichotomy between the holiday season (Thanksgiving, Hanukkah, Solstice, Christmas) and the New Year season.

The winter holidays are all external – family, celebrations, presents, feasting. We have just spent the last month giving to others. Spending money on presents, baking goodies in the oven, making feasts for friends and family, spending time with loved ones. The new year, on the other hand, is more an internal event. The turning of another year is a time for reflection and introspection. We “take stock” of where we are: what happened in the last year of our lives, and what our plans are for the upcoming year.

Sometimes this can be hard, flipping from one perspective to another. We spend months preparing for the holidays, and our heads are still reeling from everything. We spend a lot of time giving out, and it can seem selfish to now all at once be focusing on ourselves. The last month is a blur, and all of a sudden the new year kind of snuck up on us.

Yet here we are at the threshold, and it is time to think about what we will do with this gift of Time. Ellen Goodman said, “Ultimately, time is all you have, and the idea isn't to save it, but to savor it.” What can we do to savor this next year of our lives? How can we help others to savor their lives?

I grew up on a farm, so I often see the world in terms of seasons: planting season (spring), growing season (aka weeding season) (summer), harvest season (fall), and planning season (winter). These cycles translate just as well to projects and relationships in our lives. Winter is a time to evaluate what went well last year,

why things turned out the way they did, and what to do next year. “The new year can be new ground for the seeds of our dreams.” So now is the time to think about what dreams we want to plant in the new year.

Who do you want to be? What events, relationships, ideas do you want in your life? What kind of a church do we want this to be? What kind of community do we want to live in?

Go ahead, dream big.

One of the keys to life is that we get to create it. We have created everything in our lives up to this point, and we get to create the next year. I have a friend who has a refrigerator magnet that says “Life isn’t about finding yourself, but creating yourself.” It’s a very liberating thought that we have so much control. So often, we lament the situations in our life that we think control us: illness, debt, weight gain, busy schedules, divorce, weather, grief, people who boss us around or bring us down. But when we realize it’s not the situation that controls us, our entire experience can change. We are in charge of who we are, where we are, how we think. I’ll say that last part again, because it’s so important: we may not choose every thing that happens to us, but we do choose every thought we think.

I can choose to feel sorry for myself for the extra pounds that somehow snuck their way into my Christmas cookies, or I can choose to be excited for the fresh air and calm an extra walk around the block will give me. If this sounds too simplified for you, think of the inspiring examples right here in our own community of people battling terrible disease, and yet savoring every moment of life. I choose to be motivated and encouraged by their model to choose a positive attitude.

Armed with the knowledge that we get to create our next year, we’re now perusing the seed catalog of life, deciding which dreams we want to plant this year. But choosing the seed, the dream, the new year’s resolution – that’s just the beginning. In order to have a bountiful harvest, we need to prepare the ground, plant the seed, water it, and keep the field free of weeds and pests

throughout the growing season. We need a plan for how we will achieve our goals.

This can be as simple as actually buying the dental floss needed for the dream of having good dental health (and the new year's resolution of flossing more). Then, we need to water the seed: perhaps flossing during Jeopardy each night would be an attainable goal. Without a plan, the resolution of "flossing more" will always just be good intentions. But with a little forethought for how it will fit into our daily routine, we can harvest the dental health of our dreams.

Is it always so easy? Choosing love over bitterness, kindness over irritation, calm over stress – these are all a series of small decisions we make every day. No, it's not always easy, but it is always our decision.

Let's work through the process together. I'd like everyone to think of something in your own life – perhaps a new year's resolution that you've already thought about, or something about who you'd like to be this next year. I'll give you a few moments to think about it. *(Pause)*

I have a dream: *(pull out knitting project in progress)* I would like to be wearing this sweater. This may seem too quick of an analogy of how I will create my life, but it is also symbolic of taking care of myself and finding the right balance in my life.

So I've chosen the seed. Now, to plant it, we need to come up with a plan for working on it. How will you fit *your* dream into your daily life? *(Pause)* For my sweater, I will set aside at least one evening a week to work on it, probably Sunday nights, since that is generally when there are the fewest demands on my time.

We also need to be able to recognize the weeds and pests; what will be your barriers or challenges that you may need to address? *(Pause)* In the case of the sweater, the weeds will be the other projects that spring up with deadlines. I was

thinking of knitting a hat for my dad's birthday in January, but maybe I could help my brother buy him that table saw he wants instead.

How will you maintain motivation? *(Pause)* If there are other projects that crop up, I may have to barter time from one part of a week to another, but I will need to keep focused on my ultimate goal. To help deal with that, I will post this picture of the finished project in my kitchen, where I will see it every day.



In this way, one small choice after another, we can take the steps together onto new ground, where we can plant our dreams well, faithfully, and in joy.

Happy New Year!

INVOCATION *(Kathleen McTigue)*

One: The first of January is another day dawning, the sun rising as the sun always rises, the earth moving in its rhythms –

Many: With or without our calendars to name a certain day as the day of new beginning, separating old from new.

One: So it is: everything is the same, bound into its history as we ourselves are bound.

Many: Yet also we stand at a threshold, the new year something truly new, still unformed, leaving a stunning power in our hands.

One: What shall we do with this great gift of Time, this year?

Many: Let us begin by remembering that whatever justice, whatever peace and wholeness might bloom in our world this year --

One: We are the hearts and minds, the hands and feet, the embodiment of all the best visions of our people.

Many: The new year can be new ground for the seeds of our dreams.

One: Let us take the step forward together, onto new ground –

Many: Planting our dreams well, faithfully, and in joy.

PASTORAL PRAYER

Mother, Father, God, Universal Power
Remind us daily of the sanctity of all life.

Touch our hearts with the glorious oneness of all creation,
As we strive to respect all the living beings on this planet.

Penetrate our souls with the beauty of this earth,
As we attune ourselves to the rhythm and flow of the seasons.

Awaken our minds with the knowledge to achieve a world in perfect harmony
And grant us the wisdom to realize that we can have heaven on earth.

(Jo Poore)

BENEDICTION

In the words of Ralph Waldo Emerson:

Let us learn the revelation of all nature and thought; that the Highest dwells within us, that the sources of nature are in our own minds. As there is no screen or ceiling between our heads and the infinite heavens, so there is no bar or wall in the soul where we, the effect, cease, and God, the cause, begins.

I am constrained every moment to acknowledge a higher origin for events than the will I call mine. There is deep power in which we exist and whose beatitude is accessible to us. Every moment when the individual feels invaded by it is memorable. It comes to the lowly and simple; it comes to whosoever will put off what is foreign and proud; it comes as insight; it comes as serenity and grandeur.

The soul's health consists in the fullness of its reception. For ever and ever the influx of this better and more universal self is new and unsearchable. Within us is the soul of the whole; the wise silence, the universal beauty, to which every part and particle is equally related; the eternal One.

When it breaks through our intellect, it is genius; when it breathes through our will, it is virtue; when it flows through our affections, it is love.

So as you go forth into the world, savor the time we have together, and plant your dreams well. Have a new year that is happy!