

REFLECTIONS ALONG THE WAY

Dear friends,

For everything there is a season, we read in Ecclesiastes. The familiar litany continues:
a time to be born and a time to die. A time to plant, and a time to pluck up what is planted.

Until recently, I confess I'd never given much thought to that second couplet. If you'd asked me, I would probably have guessed that "pluck up what is planted" referred to harvest time: filling baskets with ripe fruit and bringing grain into our barns.

But this spring, I've discovered that isn't what the verse means at all.

I spend a lot of time planting. You probably do too: hours in meetings and conversations, sending emails and crafting agendas, planning out future projects and programs. Events like Christian Associates' 50th anniversary Jubilee Celebration are months in the making and years in the dreaming; the soil is tilled carefully long before the big day arrives.

We may have justifiable fear about the effect this pandemic will have on our communities, but we can still celebrate the ways God's providence always suffices, even in challenging times.

When the urgency to defend against COVID-19 became clear, though, all that planting seemed far less important than the necessity of protecting our neighbors. The most responsible, caring, and faithful choice was setting all our plans aside. On March 12, I sat in my office making phone calls and sending emails, crossing out one event after another from my spring calendar, until pages of empty days stared back at me. It was time to pluck up what is planted.

Indeed, in looking more carefully at this verse, I discovered that the verb for "pluck up" does not mean "harvest" at all – it's more like "to uproot" or "to weed." There are times for fruitful, productive activity, the Bible seems to say. And then there are times for ripping that work out, for taking what was growing and casting it aside altogether.

What do we have left when we pluck up what was planted? It looks like nothing, at first. Just barren ground. Stirred-up dirt. A fallow field.

Oddly enough, a fallow field might be a very appropriate way for Christian Associates to celebrate our fiftieth anniversary. Hear what the book of Leviticus says about this milestone year:

That fiftieth year shall be a jubilee for you: you shall not sow, or reap the aftergrowth, or harvest the unpruned vines. For it is a jubilee; it shall be holy to you: you shall eat only what the field itself produces.

Jubilee, after all, was a Sabbath time. Its purpose was not frenetic activity, a packed calendar, one perfect event after another. Jubilee was a time of rest for the people and rest for the planet. It was a time to discover that even when the people do not plant, the field itself produces. A time to *consider the ravens*: they neither sow nor reap, they have neither storehouse nor barn, and yet God feeds them.



Perhaps this strange season is calling us into a very different time of Jubilee. We may not be able to gather in person, but we can love one another from afar: through mail, by phone, online. We may have justifiable fear about the effect this pandemic will have on our communities, but we can still celebrate the ways God's providence always suffices, even in challenging times. We may no longer have a parade of events to attend, but that means we have more time to pray, in lament and in thanksgiving.

Our calendar may be empty, but with hope and gratitude, our hearts are full. Praying for your continued good health and strong faith.

Your sister in Christ,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Liddy".

The Rev. Liddy Barlow
Executive Minister
Christian Associates of Southwest PA

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HOPE

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