

“Going Deep”
Isaiah 55:10-13
Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23
July 16, 2023
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When our kids were little, Ryan and I learned that it is important to ask your children to do the behavior you want and not just to tell them what not to do. For example, instead of saying, “Don’t run,” you can say, “Walk.” Instead of saying, “don’t hit,” you can say, “keep your hands to yourself.”

In the Isaiah passage just read by Karen, we hear the prophet Isaiah giving hope to the people in Exile: “Instead of the **thorn** shall come up the **cypress**; instead of the **brier** shall come up the **myrtle**.” The negative will be replaced by a sign of blessing.

When God gets involved, new possibilities open up. “Instead of the thorn shall come up the cypress; instead of the brier shall come up the myrtle.” The cypress, according to the National Wildlife Federation, tend to grow along rivers and they soak up floodwaters and prevent erosion. They also trap pollutants and prevent them from spreading. They help frogs, toads and salamanders by providing a breeding ground; wood ducks nest in hollow trunks and eagles and other raptors nest in their treetops. Blessings abound where a thorn that cuts used to be.

“The myrtle tree is known for its healing properties. The leaves contain essential oils which have been used for their antibacterial and antiseptic qualities, and the berries improve digestion.” “A briar is a prickly scrambling shrub or a plant with a thorny or prickly usually woody stem.” So instead of a prickly plant a healing plant comes up.

I'd like to invite you to try this prayer with me. First let's place our palms down like this. Let us give to God things that are worrying us right now. Place in God's hands all that weighs you down. Maybe it's finances, maybe it's relationships or health. Let it out of your control, if just for this moment...

Now turn your palms up. Let us imagine with God the blessing that could take the place of the worry. "Instead of A, Lord, we would like to see B." Are there things we could do to collaborate with God in this? Is that what we truly want and what would be good for all involved? Let's ponder with God all these things... (A moment of silence) Amen.

Isaiah uses such beautiful imagery: "The mountains and the hills before you shall burst into song, and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands." Can't you picture this? Absolute joy and celebration beyond our imaginations. Talk about HOPE.

We can rest assured in God's hands; we can dare to hope. We can also collaborate with God in planting, developing and caring for the soil in our figurative and literal backyards. How can we live as a blessing to other people? As individuals? And as the church?

Instead of worry, may God make hope and delight come up in each of you. May God richly bless you. Amen.