



# *Lakeside Sermons*

Lakeside Baptist Church • Rocky Mount, North Carolina  
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Tilling the Soil:  
A Sermon in Dialogue Including  
Lakeside Youth and  
Members of the Youth Committee  
John 14:15-21, 25-27; Ephesians 4:11-16

You've heard me speak before about my grandparents' little farm where I spent summers "helping" tend the garden. I use the word "helping" loosely, of course, because I'm sure my brother, my cousins and I did far more playing in the dirt than actual work. Though, when my grandmother would come after us with a switch, we would at times stop throwing clumps of dirt or digging for buried treasure long enough to pick a some butter beans or unearth a few potatoes. My grandparents loved that garden, and since it made them so happy, I loved it, too, and many of my happiest remembrances, even now, lead me back to that place.

One of my most vivid memories of the garden, though, wasn't quite so happy, at least not initially. As my grandfather got older, my father often tried to help out with some of the heavier work, especially in preparing the field each spring. On this day, I had gone out to the farm with my dad so that he could start breaking up the three-acre patch where the garden would be planted. I was at one end clearing limbs and other debris that had fallen over the winter, and my dad was pushing the tiller some distance away. All of a sudden, I heard him yelling, shrieking really, over the roar of the tiller. He was jumping and dancing around as if the Holy Spirit had gotten hold of him right there in that field, but his shouts were far from joyful!

I set out running toward him and among the yelling could make out something about a snake and his pants leg. Within seconds, he came out of both his boots and his pants, leaving him looking down at the ground—speechless—not at a snake but at a piece of pipe that had been turned up by the tiller! You can probably imagine the family jokes we have enjoyed over the years at my dad's expense about that day!

Even without such heart-stopping events, tilling soil is hard and messy work, and one never knows what might be unearthed, but it is a necessary step in gardening. Whether we are attempting to grow beautiful flowers or

delicious fruits and vegetables, proper preparation is needed so that seeds can take root, grow, and produce a harvest.

In the teachings of Jesus and in the letters of the early Church, we find many examples of imagery comparing gardening or farming to our spiritual lives. I suspect that those who lived in an agrarian society could easily see the parallels between the kinds of preparation, hard work, nurture, and patience needed for growing plants and for growing people of faith. The tools may be different, and the kind of harvest we hope for is not exactly the same, but even though most of us no longer live off the land, and many of us aren't quite sure where our food comes from, we can still find these images meaningful for our understanding of faith development.

Throughout this year, Lakeside's children and youth have used gardening images to guide their Bible study and missions activities. During Missions & Music, the seeds of faith from Jesus' parables and the Psalms were planted in the hearts of our children as they spent the year Growing in God's Garden. Through our Bible study, missions, and fellowship activities, the youth have spent the year exploring their gifts and talents and how to put them to work in God's Kingdom so that they can continue to Bloom into the beautiful, active, and responsible people of faith God has created them to be. It has been a full and rewarding year, and today, some of our youth and Youth Committee members want to share with you just a glimpse of some of the ways Lakeside's Youth Ministry is helping to "till the soil" in the lives of our young people, preparing them for lives of faith that are useful in God's world and beautiful for all to see.

Matthew records this parable: "And Jesus told the crowds many things in parables, saying: 'Listen! A sower went out to sow. And as he sowed, some seeds fell on the path, and the birds came and ate them up. Other seeds fell on rocky ground, where they did not have much soil, and they sprang up quickly, since they had no depth of soil. But when the sun rose, they were scorched; and since they had no root, they withered away. Other seeds fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked them. Other seeds fell on good soil and brought forth grain, some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty. Let anyone with ears listen!'" (Matthew 13:3-9)

**Andrew Robillard:** Time for Bible study is important for any growing faith. As in Jesus' parable of the sower, we start with the soil of our lives, our experiences and personalities, and in community, turn them over and over to prepare them for the seeds of God's word to be planted and take root. Sunday School is one of our most important times of studying God's word together. Through the Journey to Adulthood curriculum, the youth explore

scripture through the lenses of self, society, sexuality, and spirituality in order to discover how God is working in every part of their lives and how their lives can become a witness of God's mercy and love.

**Connor Evans:** While individuals need chances to develop their gifts and to mature in faith, we are most fully who God created us to be when we grow in fellowship and love for one another. Sunday Night Live provides a safe time and space for us to gather each week to cultivate friendships by playing games, studying God's Word, tackling tough issues, exploring ways to live out our faith, and praying together. Our time together here equips us for living a life of service and involvement in the world.

"Then Jesus put before them another parable: 'The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed that someone took and sowed in his field; it is the smallest of all the seeds, but when it has grown it is the greatest of shrubs and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and make nests in its branches.'" (Matthew 13:31-32)

**Spencer Edwards:** Coming into the youth group as a sixth grader can be intimidating, even when you have been in the church since you were born. Kicking off the year with a lock-in was a great way to make new friends and bond as a group. Eating pizza, sharing a time of devotion and prayer, watching movies, going Extreme Midnight Bowling, and running around all night playing hide-n-seek and flashlight tag helped us to become closer as a group so that we could begin our journey of learning and growing together.

**Lindy Pittman:** Sometimes our Bible studies and discussions plant seeds of ministry for our youth group. On a night with frigid temperatures, about two years ago, we talked about and prayed for the needs of homeless people in our community and explored ways we could help those forced to sleep outside under such dangerous circumstances. From those ideas grew our ministry of preparing Homeless Care Bags filled with food, toiletries, and warm winter accessories. Over the past two years, we have delivered nearly 100 bags to the UCM shelter, Salvation Army and Tar River Mission Clinic to help some of our most vulnerable neighbors stay warm, clean, fed, and safe during cold winter months.

"Jesus also said, 'The kingdom of God is as if someone would scatter seed on the ground, and would sleep and rise night and day, and the seed would sprout and grow, he does not know how. The earth produces of itself, first the stalk, then the head, then the full grain in the head. But when the grain is ripe, at once he goes in with his sickle, because the harvest has come.'" (Mark 4:26-29)

**Georgia Morris:** CHAT is an organization that works throughout the year to assist children in Church Hill, one of Richmond's poorest neighborhoods, with tutoring, sports, mentoring, and enrichment activities. Last July, Lakeside's youth helped to plant seeds of faith even as we cultivated our own gifts and talents and awareness of community needs by staffing Vacation Bible School for the CHAT kids. The work was fun and challenging, and it opened our eyes to new areas of ministry and service.

**Andersen Cobb:** Including kids from a variety of different schools can be a strength for a youth group, but it also means that spending time together to form friendships and strengthen relationships is even more important. Having a strong bond within the group makes us closer to one another and draws us closer to the church and our faith. Once a month on Sunday nights after Sunday Night Live, we go out together for dessert and conversation, usually at Dunkin Donuts. At Lakeside Youth Fellowship, we hang out, eat donuts and drink coffee, talk and laugh, and as we do, we cultivate a fellowship that deepens the roots of our growing faith.

Jesus said, "I am the vine, you are the branches. Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit, because apart from me you can do nothing. As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you; abide in my love. I have said these things to you so that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete. This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. No one has greater love than this, than to lay down one's life for one's friends. You are my friends if you do what I command you. And I appointed you to go and bear fruit, fruit that will last, so that the Father will give you whatever you ask him in my name. I am giving you these commands so that you may love one another." (Selected verses from John 15:5-17)

**Kathy Painter:** The Church is one of the few places of inter-generational connection remaining in our culture, and these opportunities are important for bringing together the fresh ideas and energy of young people with the wisdom and maturity of those who are older. One of our favorite inter-generational events at Lakeside is the annual Topnotchers Valentine Banquet hosted by our youth. We enjoy a delicious banquet, fellowship around the tables, and fun games and entertainment, all so that we can grow together as a family of faith across our generations.

**Reynolds Cobb:** As people of faith, we learn that it is important to serve, not only out in the community and world, but also with our own family of faith. One of the ways the youth serve within our congregation is to lead activities for the younger children. From working as helpers for Vacation Bible School, to dressing in costume to staff the games and crafts for the Fall Festival, to

hiding Easter eggs on Palm Sunday, we help to set a good example and to provide fun events to help Lakeside's younger children to blossom in their faith.

In his letter to the Romans, Paul writes, "We have different gifts, according to the grace given to each of us. If your gift is prophesying, then prophesy in accordance with your faith; if it is serving, then serve; if it is teaching, then teach; if it is to encourage, then give encouragement; if it is giving, then give generously; if it is to lead, do it diligently; if it is to show mercy, do it cheerfully." (Romans 12:6-8)

**Carol Barker:** Opportunities to travel to other parts of the country in order to seek understanding of other faiths and worship experiences while deepening our own faith in Christ help our youth to blossom in ways few other experiences can, but these trips are only possible when the financial resources are available. The Lakeside congregation is generous in many areas of mission and ministry, especially in supporting our youth through their fund raising efforts, such as the annual Casserole Sale, gift wrapping, and occasional yard sales. With the support of your time and talents and money, you help to provide fertile soil in which young faith can grow.

**Alaya Banks:** The ski retreat to West Virginia is just plain fun! Yes, we worship with other CBF youth groups from across North Carolina and have nightly devotions, but mostly we have a good time tubing and skiing! Trips like this help us to laugh together and to connect with one another so that we can grow as brothers and sisters in Christ.

And to the church at Ephesus, Paul writes, "The gifts he gave were that some would be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until all of us come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to maturity, to the measure of the full stature of Christ. We must no longer be children, tossed to and fro and blown about by every wind of doctrine, by people's trickery, by their craftiness in deceitful scheming. But speaking the truth in love, we must grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and knitted together by every ligament with which it is equipped, as each part is working properly, promotes the body's growth in building itself up in love." (Ephesians 4:11-16)

**Andy Barker:** In February, we gathered at the YMCA with over 100 youth and 40 adults from a dozen Rocky Mount youth groups to play games, share a meal, and talk about the challenges and resources in our community. We had

fun, but more importantly, we planted seeds of new friendships, of cooperation among youth groups across our city, and of hope for a stronger community for us all.

**Barkley Browder:** Every year at Gatekeepers, we come together with other youth to repair homes and to build relationships. We work hard, painting and building and cleaning and restoring so that our neighbors will have homes that are safer, more secure, and more beautiful. As we build, we also grow--We grow in skills that we learn through our work, ingratitude for all that we have, in love for our neighbors, and in service to God's Kingdom.

Each of these opportunities and activities demonstrates the variety of ways that our young people are growing through their participation in our youth ministry. We could, of course, include myriad examples from every facet of our ministries here at Lakeside. Through worship and education, music and missions, fellowship and discipleship, for every age group, every class, every circle, every committee, we are tilling the soil of each life that is touched by this congregation so that seeds of faith can be planted, to the end that each one can grow into the full stature of Christ.

It is, of course, not by our doing that this growth occurs, for, as the parables of Jesus and the words of Paul tell us, growing faith is the work of the Holy Spirit, and the ways it happens are a mystery. But as followers of Christ, as brothers and sisters to one another, and as witnesses of God's mercy to the world, we are called to do the work of preparation--of tilling the soil and of planting and nurturing the seeds--so that the gifts of the Spirit can grow to maturity within each of us. Young and old, male and female, with whatever combination of talents and attributes and perspectives we bring, we are called to live and to love so that our lives and the lives of all God's children can grow to full, colorful, beautiful bloom. So, let's gather our tools and put on our work gloves. We've got some gardening to do.

**May 15, 2016**

**Prayer of Thanksgiving and Intercession**

We admit, O God, that we do not always understand some of the things we read in the Bible. Empty tombs, ascending bodies, and flames of fire dancing in the air are not a part of our daily lives. We do understand, however, that sense of inner peace that comes when we do not expect it, that awareness that we are not alone when no one else is around, and that assurance that you are here with us in all of the experiences of life. For the gift of your presence through the Holy Spirit, we are grateful, and we celebrate today.

We also celebrate because on Pentecost you gave birth to the church and called your believers together to share your Gospel with the world. We are grateful for what this family of faith means to us and for all that you have done for us and through us.

Today we also celebrate the young people in our congregation. We have watched them grow through the years, claim their faith, and live it day to day. We ask your blessing upon them and their families. We pray for your guidance as the decisions they make become more and more significant. We ask for your watchcare over them as they step into the larger world and discover the world you have given to them. Bless, guide, and protect them, we pray.

We seek those same gifts for us all, O God. Among us are many needs of body, mind, and spirit. Throughout the world are problems that we do not know how to solve. Within us are dilemmas that we cannot handle alone. Provide what we need to live whole and healthy lives, we pray. Tend to us when we are ill, direct us when we are confused, and steady us when we are in despair. Like the first believers, manifest your Spirit to us in ways we can understand. Dwell within us and live through us, we pray, in the name of Christ. Amen.

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