

“Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, so that he may exalt you in due time. Cast all your anxiety on him, because he cares for you. Discipline yourselves, keep alert. Like a roaring lion your adversary the devil prowls around, looking for someone to devour. Resist him, steadfast in your faith, for you know that your brothers and sisters in all the world are undergoing the same kinds of suffering. And after you have suffered for a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, support, strengthen, and establish you. To him be the power forever and ever. Amen.” 1 Peter 5:6-11.

Dear Christian friends,

The Canadian author, W. O. Mitchell, wrote a book titled Roses Are Difficult Here. The setting of the book is southwestern Alberta in the foothills of the Canadian Rockies. It chronicles the lives of people in the 1950's, highlighting the struggles and triumphs that life in a rural community can bring. The title relates the reality for one woman who struggles year after year to keep a rose bush growing. Roses are difficult to grow in southern and central Alberta. They are a tender plant more suitably adapted for warmer and more stable climates. Bug infestations, fungi and viruses are constant threats. Our chinook winds fool them into premature growth in winter. It takes much talent to grow a rose in Alberta! Her relationship to growing the rose is an analogy to our relationships in life.

I have thought much about that book and its title this summer. My reflecting started back in May shortly after some dedicated, proficient gardener women of the church had planted flowers in the flower beds. I noticed the Marigolds were doing poorly. Now Marigolds normally are a gardener's certainty. They are a very hardy plant which are resistant to bugs, fungus and disease. (If you can't grow a Marigold, you can't grow anything!) I was really puzzled by the poor growth and even death of numerous plants. I checked them for an insect infestation and could find nothing. The foliage was crimped and I considered that perhaps some herbicide had drifted on the plants. Most of those plants eventually died. I hated to see the work and effort of those ladies go to naught. The blooms add beauty to our environment. In early July I bought some replacements, thinking perhaps the original plants were a defective batch.

Late in July I noticed the Marigolds in my ground planters at home were beginning to exhibit the same growth pattern as the early ones at Church and they were struggling. I knew I could rule out herbicide contamination. Most of the other flower varieties were doing reasonably well. The marigolds in the flower pots were okay. Thus my sleuthing began. Eventually I found the culprit: slugs! It has taken dedication and discipline since to tend those marigolds. Nightly I go on my slug quest. Within days of some tender care the Marigolds have begun to respond. Their foliage has become more robust again. The flower buds are multiplying and there even are wonderful blossoms again. Roses are difficult here, but so too can be marigolds.

The book and my experience in the garden have helped me to reflect upon our journey of faith – our spiritual relationship with God. Our faith is a relationship and as all relationships it has its ups and downs. With my marigolds I had a choice. I could have left them to struggle alone and received whatever befell them. Or I could invest some time and care in them to receive the beauty of their blooms. This is much the same as our spiritual relationship. We can leave it to whatever chance and circumstance will bring it. Or we can nurture it, investing some time and discipline to it and reap its richness. We know we have an adversary who longs for our unhappiness and even demise, just as my marigolds had their tormentors. We also have a savior who has given his life for our freedom – Christ Jesus the LORD. We do not walk alone. While some days our spiritual journey can be a challenge the summit vista is worth the struggle.

“Discipline yourselves, keep alert. Like a roaring lion your adversary the devil prowls around, looking for someone to devour. Resist him, steadfast in your faith, for you know that your brothers and sisters in all the world are undergoing the same kinds of suffering.” 1 Peter 5: 8,9. Excellent words to heed as we settle into our more normal rhythm of life at this end of summer. Discipline is a part of the response we make in our life of faith that God's presence will guide us on right pathways. Beware of your adversary. Grow to be the full blossom of God's love present in life and the world!

In Christ forever, Pastor Kevin.

PS: I'll keep my battle with lily beetles for another column!