

October at Pilgrims Place

Diary from Pilgrims Place :No 2

Conversations With God in the Garden

October arrived dry, hot and windy, with the worst dust storms for decades. The half hour watering twice a week has saved the garden to a certain extent but I was beginning to find the bucketing necessary on other days heavy work. A depression began to settle just as smothering as the dust on the plants. "How can I keep this garden attractive so people would want to come and sit?" I whined to God. Eventually I shook off enough dust to unplug my ears and listen,

"Whose garden?" "Whose responsibility?" God quietly took things out of my hands and sent our grandchildren over the next few weekends. Not much gardening happens then. Then God sent the rain. 90mm to Caboolture! Overnight the lawn turned green. I was reminded of Hildegard of Bingen's expression "The greening of the soul". How I long for that . New shoots of love, trust and peace.



Rod was busy building the chook house. Perhaps the only moveable chook house in the world with insulated fiberglass half roof? We eagerly awaited the arrival of our three new householders at Pilgrims Place. They are a grey Plymouth Rock, black Australorp



and brown Rhode Island Red, easily distinguishable for the grandchildren. The grey has been named Queenie alias "Bossie Boots" as she has decided she is the matriarch of the hen house. She pecks and pushes and decides who sleeps where and keeps all the tasty tidbits for herself. She is also the only one laying so far. The black, named Lorix (from Dr Suess) holds her own pretty well but Alice, the brown, is easily pushed around and often has to sleep in awkward spots after being shoved off the perch. It's like a little cameo of people. Funny, yet a bit too close to home. Well in fact it is a picture of unredeemed humanity. How we need the grace of God to save us from ourselves.

I had planted a Buddleja davidii and eagerly awaited its flowering expecting purple or mauve



flowers (The picture on the plant showed 6 different colours). Instead the flowers were a pale yellow cream. How often life is like that – full of disappointments. Do we hug them to ourselves? Unable to let go and end up being robbed of any joy in the present.

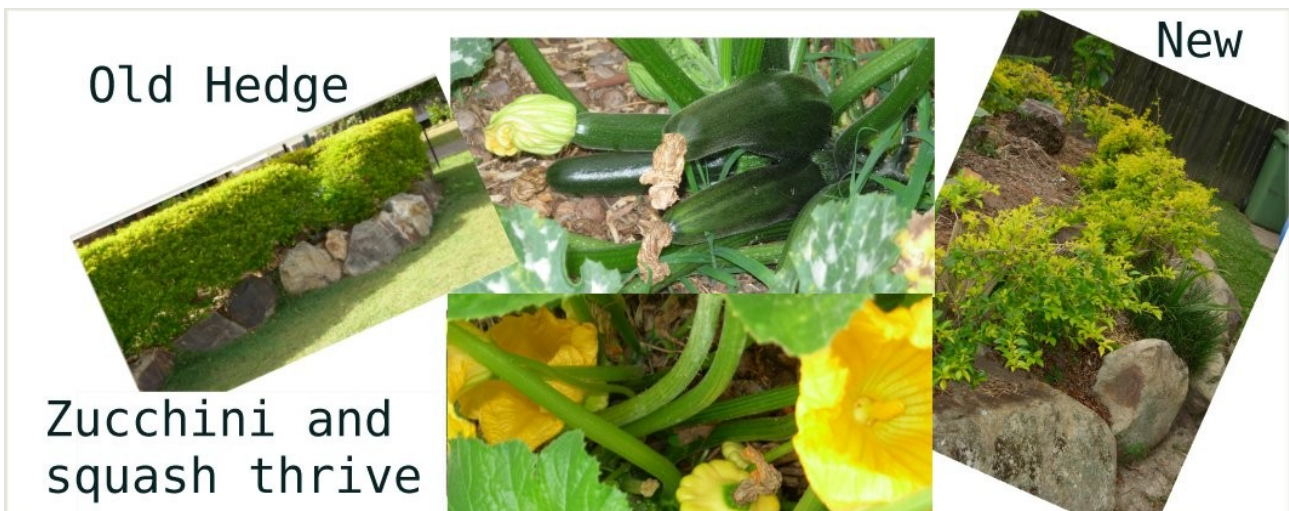
The space once occupied by the sprawling passionfruit is now filled with healthy sweet corn.



Unfortunately one of the passionfruit did not survive my pruning. The Panama Red is sending out many new shoots and vines whereas the Nellie Kelly is just bare stalks, dead. I ponder this as I scrub the white scale on roses belonging to my son, Matthew (John F Kennedy) and Rod (Papa Meilland). I pray as I work, *“Reveal to them Father, anything that is creeping into their lives robbing them of their joy in you. Smothering them, putting a wall between them and you”*.

My scrubbing became a bit too vigorous and a new shoot was knocked off. I stopped aghast. I was getting too enthusiastic just like pruning the passionfruit too hard. How easily we can be so caught up in eliminating undesirable characteristics in those we love that our methods rub off anything good and new that's growing. Parenting is such a balance between curbing behaviour and allowing children to be themselves. *“Father, give us wisdom”*.

Rod decided that the front hedge needed pruning hard to make it thicken at the bottom. *“Now is the time with summer storms coming”* Rod said. Just a few minutes work and it looked like a scarecrow. The Zucchini's and Squash loved it. As the sun poured in they bore bigger and healthier vegetables. Sure enough after the rains the hedge has started to thicken.



“For everything there is a season” says Ecclesiastes. Yet often I still try to fight it, only ending up in

work, fatigue and frustration. No one in the Northern Hemisphere expects to have a flowering garden in Winter. Here it is the Summer when the garden needs to rest. Pots to a minimum, heavy mulch on the garden beds to aid moisture retention. Time to spend on other jobs in the house. Gardening has to be limited to early morning or late afternoon. Now is the time to plan and prepare for the months when the garden is a delight to relax in.

I attended the October meeting of the Kabultur Eastenders, our local community progress association to inform them of our Quiet Garden and invite local residents to use it. People seemed interested and asked for an article for the next newsletter. There is certainly many articles to write and people to see if I really want this garden to be used by the community.

September at Pilgrims Place

October Edition: Diary from Pilgrims Place :No1 Conversations With God in the Garden

At the beginning of September, Rod and I spent eleven days touring the South Island of New Zealand marveling at God's awesome creation. My mind's photo bank has been filled with pictures of cherry blossom, daffodils and blue bells. We were blessed to capture it at just the right time:- fields with baby lambs frisking around and mother ducks rounding up fluffy baby ducks at water's edge. I brought back a glass replica of a fern unfolding, the Maori symbol for new life, to decorate our home altar. May it always remind me of the new life we have in Christ.



Back home to Pilgrims Place! I pondered at the difference it has made giving our house a name. It is hard to put my finger on it, but I know there was a sense of being welcomed home by the atmosphere of the house and garden.

Th
nothing



for a week and then a friend's generous gift of watering
pick a basketful of vegetables.

Winter seems long gone as
now in the high 20's and so

The roses were
in full bloom such as this
Graham Thomas with
it's deep yellow tightly
furred petals.





Nasturtiums were now trailing over the garden edges.

The Hippiastrums are also coming out, they seem a bit early probably due to that 36 degrees in late August.

The strawberries were at their peak.



I love seeing the delight on the faces of our grandchildren as they pick baskets of ripe red strawberries.



As I inspected the garden I noticed the leaves on the Gardinia Augusta, *Aimee Yoshiba*, were going yellow. What is wrong? I looked up my gardening manuals and found it needed some iron. Also some more acidic fertilizer. No point looking it up and doing nothing so a trip to the hardware store was made. Our walk with God is like that- listening and then doing.

Sometimes it entails searching God's word to be reminded of a message God wants me to hear but then I have to do it. Perhaps that involves finding what is missing in my soul ground because I see the "yellowed leaves" of something not right that will spoil the flowering of my soul



The big task was to tackle the passionfruit vines which had been allowed to take over the whole back garden. They had barely any fruit left on, but we had enjoyed months of *Panama Red* and *Nellie Kelly* passionfruit on our morning bowl of fruit. A few hours later the trailer was full of the prunings, the vines cut back to a few main stems and fertilized. Now, exposed, stood a whole vegetable patch waiting to be dug, manured, spread with compost and raked ready for planting.

While enjoying the fruit we had turned a blind eye to the disappearing vegetable garden.

As I gazed at the bare ground I knew God was speaking to me again. Cut back, prune. Something that is good in itself is taking over and preventing something new from growing. The picture is so

vivid, I can't escape it. I must seek what it is that is taking over my soul ground. Sometimes there is a season for allowing something to take over - like my going to university there wasn't time or energy for much else, or preparing for weddings in the family or the birth of a baby but these naturally come to an end. Other times it is harder to see what it is that is crowding out your life, perhaps something as simple as the TV taking up time that could be used for "growing new things".



Painted Lady or
Sweet Peas

The next task was to remove all the spent sweet pea vines. *Painted Lady* came into my garden from seeds given to me by my mother from her garden. Unlike most commercial seed pack varieties they self seed and bloom every year. In places they too had taken over an area and given their perfume and colour joyfully.



Unfortunately they sometimes covered up something underneath and as I pruned I found my *Pink Iceberg* rose had been totally smothered to the point that it was covered in white scale.

Once cleared I then got some dishwasher detergent in water and an old tooth brush and scrubbed the scale off so the bush could breathe again. All my roses are planted for a loved one. *Pink Iceberg* belongs to my daughter in law, Anna. I prayed for her as I worked. Some of these seeds will be packaged up and given to friends thus spreading the enjoyment of this beautiful plant. How do I spread God's love, joy and peace?

We had been so excited about installing our waterfall so it had been disheartening to see the water disappearing at an alarming rate. We finally concluded it wasn't just evaporation there had to be a leak. We prised it out of the ground and Rod set about fibre-glassing another layer underneath it and around its sides. It's back in the ground now, curing. We have to wait until we can fill it and test it for leaks. Leaks sure take time to fix. What about my leaks? In my *awareness examen** at the end of the day, I notice there are usually a few leaks of my patience, or joy or peace. The quietness of the evening offers time and space to bring them before the Lord for his "fixing".

So September draws to a close. The next few months will be hot and the early morning and evening will be the best times to enjoy the garden.

***Awareness Examen-** *The Spiritual Exercises by Saint Ignatius of Loyola*. The awareness examen contemplates the day with gratitude and seeks to discern the traces of God at work in it.

I give thanks I remember the graces, benefits and good things in my day.

I ask for help I ask the Spirit for the light to discern my day with openness.

I review my day I review my day to see how God has been working in my life.

I respond. I respond to what I have just learnt or felt in my review.

I resolve I resolve, with hope and his grace, to amend my life tomorrow.

There are five points.

The first point seeks to make me aware that I live in the stream of God's love – where all is gift. I review the day recalling all it's gifts, large and small, and allow gratitude to well up in me.

The second point is a simple prayer for help.

The third point asks me to carefully search out how God is working in my life. I ask how God is at work in my day, by moving through it hour by hour, with this question in my mind. My awareness will grow with practice and I will become sensitive to the gentle breath of the Spirit flowing through my day. After reviewing my day I look to see if there are any patterns of life or death in my week past. Is there a pattern of events or relationships that consoles me and gives me life? Is there a pattern that desolates or deadens me? How does God work best through me? How may I work best with God?

The fourth point allows me to respond to what I experienced in the previous point. Natural responses might be thanksgiving or sorrow or wonder or sadness or sheer delight.

The fifth point considers the loving way forward into the next day. I might resolve to concentrate on developing some virtue or grace or gift. I might seek to improve some area of my life or relationships. Or I might choose an action or response to my new awareness. In all cases, I will do my best and surrender the outcome to God.

Taken from The Faber Centre for Ignatian Spirituality, Brisbane.