

Everyone Everywhere, Growing in Faith – Growth

The word growth brought an image to my mind of a seed planted in the ground, hidden in the dark earth. As it germinates the new seedling uses the energy stored in the seed to grow roots heading down and a shoot heading up towards the light. While the seedling grows the seed becomes shrivelled, eventually becoming nothing more than a husk: its purpose is fulfilled, and it ceases to be. As the seedling grows the seed itself dies.

Jesus uses this image to talk about our lives and when we grow into what God intends for us. We, also in some sense die.

John 12:23 - 25

²³ Jesus replied, "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. ²⁴Very truly I tell you, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds. ²⁵ Anyone who loves their life will lose it, while anyone who hates their life in this world will keep it for eternal life.

There is a cost to the surrender which we make so that Jesus becomes the Lord of our lives. Of course, the seedling grows from the seed and so the seed in some way lives on in the new plant. So, God uses what we bring to him from our lives so far and uses this to 'power' the new thing he does with us. But death is inextricably part of growth.

The seedling also depends on more than the seed to grow; it needs water and nutrients from the soil, and once it emerges above ground, it needs sunlight. The seedling, as it grows into a mature plant, also depends on the plants surrounding it. Gardeners wanting to give their plants natural protection from pests have long known about companion planting. This is done by growing herbs, or aromatic plants, next to the crop plants to protect them from particular pests. The plants surrounding the seedling affect its growth in a very tangible way, and this is not always positive; weeds can stifle the seedling surprisingly quickly. The effect of surrounding plants continues as they grow and mature. There have been fascinating recent scientific discoveries about how trees within a forest support and communicate with one another through connections made by fungal threads (mycelia), in the soil. The connections allow the trees to share resources between them and also surprisingly share information, for example about grazing by animals. Many of the images Paul uses to describe the churches he writes to include ideas of connection and interdependency. Think of how he describes the church being a building with each of us being a stone, connected to and held in place by the other stones around us. Or a body made of different parts, all needing one another, all connected and acting together. Jesus, when talking to the disciples the night before he goes to the cross, describes his people as connected to him as the branches of a vine are connected to the vine itself. The vine branches can only bear fruit by abiding in him, the vine. We often focus on this primary connection; the branches to the vine; but of course all the branches are also all connected to each other. So, our growth depends not only on our connection to Jesus, but our interconnectedness to each other. Just as the trees in the forest need each other to flourish and grow, so as members of God's body on earth we need each other.

Thinking of growth means thinking of how strong, mutual and dynamic are our connections to one another. God's witness requires us to tell his wonderful gospel together, not only in words, but also practically in the love we show to each other in the mundane, ordinary, routine things of life.

Reflection by Caryl Plewes