



Carstairs-Bancroft United Church

February 3, 2021

**DAILY ENCOURAGEMENT
DURING COVID-19 PANDEMIC**

By Rev. Maria Szabo Berces



Source: hgtv.com

Beloved Carstairs Bancroft United Church Members,

After last night's snowfall, and the forecast we have for this weekend, there will be quite some time when we will be able to see pictures like the attached photo in our environment. And as we follow the news and the updates of our health authorities, there will be quite some time that we will be able to get rid of the restrictions and the dangers, which are produced by Covid-19.

What encouragement and wisdom may we gain from the Scriptures in times when our patience and perseverance is tested?

It is our human nature that we try to find a 'rationale' in what's going around us and in our lives. We want to know the "why", and tend to find someone to blame in case things go wrong. In some cases, we can see the mistakes we ourselves made. In other cases, we blame others, or God for the pain or losses we can't untangle.

In my understanding of what the Almighty wants to tell us through our faith and the Bible is that the Holy One never wants to destroy us! God gave us life, and all the wonderful things around us that makes life not only possible but enjoyable.

Remember yesterday's promise through Prophet Jeremiah? God has **"plans to give you hope and a future."** (Jeremiah 29:11) Jesus confirmed this promise and intention: **"The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full."** (John 10:10)

The Our Daily Bread devotion below emphasizes that trials can have the capacity to make us stronger and even to thrive as time passes by if we are able to stay close to Jesus and God during those challenging times. We are encouraged to cry out to the One with whom **"all things are possible"** (Mark 10:27)

Are we able to believe that the above statement is true? Do we have a picture of an Almighty, and the same time caring and loving God in our minds and hearts? To trust what Apostle Paul formulated like this: **"And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him..."** (Romans 8:28)

We may know that **"God ... is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in love"** (Joel 2:13); and that **"everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved"** (Joel 2:32)

These are not only promising words, but life experiences of those who relied on the Almighty throughout the stormy centuries of human history. So, let us not lose heart, but remain in the love of God, who was embodied in Jesus the Christ. Let us remember, in him we can be **"more fruitful"** despite of - or even because of – challenging times.

Grace and Peace to You All,

Rev. Maria



Pruned to Thrive

Every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful.

John 15:2

READ JOHN 15:1-12

As I watched a bumblebee land lightly on the Russian sage, I marveled at the bush's lush branches exploding with color. Its brilliant blue blossoms attracted eyes and bees alike. Yet only last fall, I'd wondered if it would ever blossom again. When my wife's parents trimmed the periwinkle plant down to a stub, I'd assumed they'd decided to get rid of it. But now I was witnessing the radiant result of pruning that had seemed brutal to me.

The surprising beauty that results from harsh cuts may be one of the reasons Jesus chose pruning imagery to describe God's work among believers. In John 15, He says, "I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. . . . Every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful" (vv. 1-2).

Jesus' words remind us that in the good times and bad, God is always working in us toward spiritual renewal and fruitfulness (v. 5). During "pruning" seasons of suffering or emotional barrenness, we may wonder if we'll ever thrive again. But Christ encourages us to continue to stick close to Him: "No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me" (v. 4).

As we continually draw spiritual nourishment from Jesus, the resulting beauty and fruitfulness in our lives (v. 8) will show the world God's goodness. – By **Adam R. Holz**

REFLECT & PRAY

Father, help me to trust You during difficult seasons in my life, knowing that You're at work to bring beauty and change. Amen.

For help in strengthening your faith, read [Going the Distance](#).

How have you seen God use struggle in your life to produce growth and fruitfulness? How do you think time gives us the perspective to see God's hand at work in our lives?

SCRIPTURE INSIGHT

Jesus delivered the teaching found in John 15 not long before His trial and crucifixion—His last opportunity to warn the disciples not to be like Judas but to be steadfast in their faith and to bear fruit. The fertility of the vine (a common plant in Israel at that time) naturally suggested spiritual fruit-bearing. This illustration was not new to those familiar with the Old Testament (Psalm 80:8; 128:3; Isaiah 5:1-7). The main emphasis of John 15:1-17—as evidenced by the word's repetition eleven times—is the message to "remain" in Him: "If you remain in me . . . you will bear much fruit" (v. 5). – By **Alyson Kieda**

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