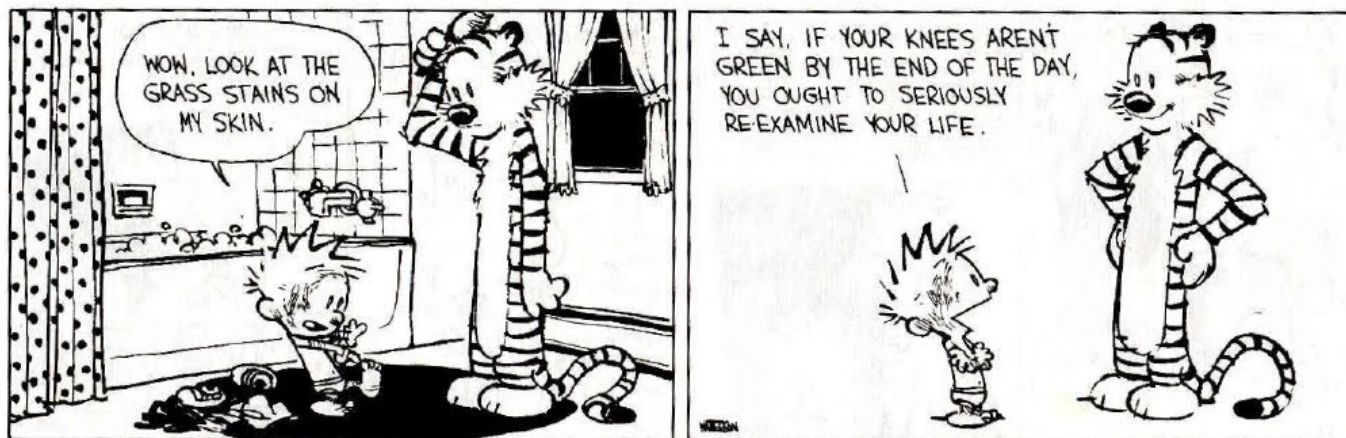


On Digging in Dirt



The thing I love most about springtime, living in the mid-Atlantic, are the colors. A long, ever-changing bursting forth of perennials after almost a year of hibernation. First it's the hyacinths. Then the daffodils. Then tulips of every color and variety (these are my favorites). Currently, the tulips are past their prime, but the hostas are in bloom. And soon, the day lilies will make their debut.

When we bought our current house, it came adorned with an array of bulbs already planted. Which is a good thing, because I am not a gardener and would not know where to begin. I have often joked that I could kill a cactus in the desert. The truth is, I *have actually* managed to kill a cactus in the desert. More than once.

But I discovered an appreciation for the earth's bounty in my previous appointment in Adams County, Pennsylvania – an area ripe (sometimes literally) with fruit orchards as far as the eye can see. What sets this area apart is the quality of the soil,

which contains certain nutrients that are only found in Adams County, as well as Italy's wine country. This was the first place where I was ever able to plant a seed and watch it grow into a plant. I'm fully-convinced that in Adams County, if one were to plant a rock, it would probably grow into a rock tree.

While I still do not love gardening, I must admit that there is something oddly spiritual – wholly sacred – about the experience of digging in the dirt. Of celebrating earthworms and feeling against our skin the stuff of decay, broken down to nourish something new. The *adam*, the human being, digging in the *adama*, the dirt, the ground from which we came.

What happens when we dig in the dirt? In the words of Barbara Brown Taylor:

“You remember where you came from, and why. You touch the stuff your bones are made of. You handle the decomposed bodies of trees, leaves, birds, and fallen stars. Your body recognizes its kin. If you have nerve enough, you also foresee

your own decomposition. This is not bad knowledge to have. It is the kind that puts other kinds in perspective. Feel that cool dampness? Welcome back to earth, you earthling. Smell that dirt? Welcome home, you beloved dust-creature of God.”¹

So this spring, I plan to make it one of my new spiritual practices to plant something, and watch it grow. To get dirty, and to celebrate my innate kinship with the ground in which I dig. And perhaps, in so doing, the God of creation will breathe a new kind of much-needed nourishment and connectedness into my soul.

Questions for Reflection:

1. **What is your experience with gardening? Do you find it lifegiving? Frustrating? Why?**
2. **Do you have a favorite plant – a tree or a flower or a fruit or vegetable plant? What is it about this particular plant that brings you joy?**

¹Barbara Brown Taylor, *An Altar in the World* (New York: HarperOne, 2009), p. 151.