

Children’s Moment

Hello, girls and boys. Esperanza and I pray for you and your family. We love you and we appreciate you.

We’re starting a new series of lessons today. We’re going to learn about how God plants spiritual seeds in us that help us grow and become who God made us to be.

To help us understand the wonderful way God works in us and all of creation, I invite you to join us in a cool activity. We’re going to plant some seeds, tend to them indoors and then see what happens over the next six weeks. This is a great way to do something good for the season of Lent, which goes from now until Easter.

Esperanza is going to help me, just like your family can help you. It’s a great way to do something fun together.

First, let’s start with seeds. You can use any kind of seeds you like – flowers, herbs or vegetables. Here are some seeds Esperanza and I have. These seeds represent the seed God plants in us. It’s a spiritual seed and it comes in all sorts of varieties.

Next, let’s look at the soil. We have two kinds here: one is a pellet designed to help seeds get started, while the second is potting soil in a small container. Both are good for seeds. We are the soil God uses to plant spiritual seeds in. If we are open and ready, we are good soil. If we are closed and turn away, we are soil that needs preparation.

Okay, now we’re ready for planting. Esperanza is going to show us how to plant a seed. Notice that she doesn’t push it deep. The seed starts off shallow so it can feel the warmth of the sun and get water. That’s how it grows. Later, the roots will go deeper. When we first hear about Jesus, we may be interested. We want to know more. That’s how God plants a spiritual seed. It’s not deep, but as we feel the warmth of Jesus’ love and the living water he offers, our faith will begin to grow.

The last step is important. Esperanza is showing how to give the seed some water and put it in a place where it will be warm and receive sunlight when it sprouts. Seeds need a warm, moist environment to sprout. And young plants need sunlight to be healthy. God cares for us by grace. Our parents, Sunday school teachers and pastors teach us

about Jesus – that’s the water we need. When we talk to God, read the Bible, attend Sunday school and care for others, we’re sitting in God’s like, beginning to sprout.

That’s our lesson for today. Watch your plants this week. Don’t over water them or leave them out in the cold. It’s not good to be left alone or to have too much of a good thing at one time.

We’ll check in next week and see how our seeds are doing.

Will you pray with me?

You are invited to be part of Sunday School online.

Visit www.coronaumc.com/childrensministry to sign up.

Message: “Root Bound”**Esperanza and I like to go to nurseries like many of you do.**

It’s always amazing to see row after row of potted plants - succulents, flowers, grasses, bushes and evergreens, laid out. They nestle together, rubbing shoulders, if you will, for hours on end.

Some of those potted plants end up coming home. They find a place on our porch or in the house, alongside other potted plants. And that’s where they rest for weeks and years. They may move around on occasion, but their existence is limited to the pot they live in. We enjoy them. They’re nice to look at.

“But are they connected together?” Not at all. Sure, they are next to each other, but they aren’t connected in the soil. They don’t share water from the hose. Their roots are restricted. When you move one of them, there’s no pull and tug on the others. The plants may be grouped together, but they are also alone.”¹

How many of us and how many of our church communities are just like these potted plants? Grouped together but not connected. This past year has been brutal. It’s life changing. There are new limits and boundaries everywhere you look. Social distancing and wearing masks are part of the norm. Working remotely, attending school online, Zoom family gatherings, Sunday school and church by video; the list of ways we’ve had to adapt is long. While necessary, many of these precautions serve to isolate us, raising the walls of our pots even higher.

And we aren’t the only ones affected. Our households are affected. School age children have lost ground in their learning. College students are affected. Graduates are struggling to find jobs. These delays will impact development, careers and, potentially, lifetime earnings for some. Our growth is slowing in some cases, stagnant in others and dying in far too many.

The trauma and grief we’re dealing with is having even greater impact. My heart goes out to the hospital staff, caregivers and families who face steep challenges caring for the sick with far too many deaths. We’re facing a mass casualty event, a 9/11, every, single day!

¹ [*The Peril of Potted Plant Christianity - J.A. Medders*](#)

Trauma and grief aren’t about numbers. They’re about each person who dies; their name, face and life story. Their loved ones feel the loss. Many times, there is great sorrow and anger over the circumstances. Some of you know the cost of going to the hospital with a serious case of COVID-19 more intimately and authentically than anyone else. The separation from our loved ones in their last days is heart-rending.

This brings me back to our metaphor: life as a potted plant is perilous. Even in a church family, it’s possible to sit next to each other and never be connected to one another. We can be close but closed off. Community isn’t defined by mere closeness. Proximity does not equal family or relationship.

J.A. Medders wrote, “Jesus didn’t die for a group of potted plants. He gave his life to redeem a people, a vineyard, sheep in his pen.”² Real communities have roots. They pray for one another, serve one another, help one another, care for one another and love one another. Real communities weep and celebrate together in a chain reaction of connectedness. You can’t tug on one member without others feeling it. In this way, we share and bear our burdens. We know and are known.

This kind of community mixes together, grows together and supports each other, like branches from a vine. Jesus knew this. He said, *“I am the vine; you are the branches. The one who remains in me and I in [them] produces much fruit, because you can do nothing without me”* (John 15:5).

Potted plants can’t bear much fruit. But a farm does. Fields flourish. I remember my grandfather’s farm: the harvest from even a small, well-tended field is amazing. Jesus is preparing the fields, our households and community, all around us. The question is whether we’re ready to roll up our sleeves and do the work of tending and harvesting what God has already planted. This means connecting, mixing and being part of each other’s lives and the lives of the people in our households and community.

It’s all about relationships. And that starts with you and me.

² *Ibid*

The image that inspired this series is a root bound plant.

A couple of months ago, Esperanza was on our porch working with her plants. One of the pots was cracked. The plant wasn't doing well in the first place, but when I removed the pot, the reason was obvious. Two-thirds of the pot was filled with a gigantic root. It had pushed the soil out and, when faced with a trauma, cracked and broke the pot.

Without being transplanted to a new, larger pot with fresh soil, the plant would die. Pruning the plant by cutting away a big part was necessary. Otherwise, it wouldn't be able to grow and thrive in its new environment. The core part of the root is still present. The plant is flourishing. New fruit are gifts from this restoration.

We are like that root bound plant. This past year, we have outgrown our old pot. We need a new, larger vision. We need the fresh, new soil that nourishes. We need to prune away some of those things that don't give us life, but actually limit our ability to be healthy and fruitful.

In short, we need to be transplanted. David's words in Psalm 51:10 speak to the grief and trauma of our lives, a call for freedom from whatever limits and binds us: *“Create in me a clean heart, O God, and put a new and right spirit within me.”*

We have a good root, a holy root. We are connected to the source of life, Jesus. Jesus changes our lives for the better when we are together, connected to each other, engaged in meaningful and spiritual ways.

I invite you to be part of our spiritual journey during this season of Lent. We will wrestle and be inspired by the love of God. We will drink from the living water Jesus offers and learn ways to cope, change and grow. To begin, let me give you a snapshot of an amazing life story and some life lessons we can follow.

Dr. Edith Eger is a 92-year-old clinical psychologist, born in Hungary to a Jewish family. As teen Edith was a budding gymnast and dancer. Then on a cold April day in 1944, she, her parents and one of her sisters were loaded into a cattle car and sent to Auschwitz concentration camp. Her parents were killed in the gas chambers that first day.

How did she survive and become the engaging therapist she is today, helping people suffering from anxiety, depression and trauma?

As Dr. Eger says in her book, [The Gift](#), “The worst prison is not the one the Nazis put me in. The worst prison is the one I built for myself.”³

Here are some tools Dr. Eger offers to us for breaking out of our own personal prisons, for being transplanted out of our pots:

First, don’t run from your past. A common response to trauma is to escape. We can move, bury ourselves with work, go to school, even marry and have a family. And all the while we’re hiding from the misery we feel, keeping it a secret, even from ourselves. It’s hard, but facing our secrets is the only way to reclaim our lives. Dr. Eger says, ‘Until I could face the truth, I had my secret and my secret had me.’

John wrote, “*My dear children, let’s not just talk about love; let’s practice real love. This is the only way we’ll know we’re living truly, living in God’s reality. It’s also the way to shut down debilitating self-criticism, even when there is something to it. For God is greater than our worried hearts and knows more about us than we do ourselves*” (1 John 3:18-20, MSG). God will help you face your past.

Next, you can’t heal what you don’t feel. We can become experts on caring for others without knowing how to care for ourselves. We can revisit places where we were traumatized. Doing so is incredibly difficult. Sometimes just a word, a picture or a situation can trigger a reaction. It can feel like the trauma and grief was easier then, than reliving it now. Be courageous but gentle with yourself. When you face your feelings and let them out, you’ll feel a little freer. You’ll be able to move forward, one step at a time.

Paul knew trauma in his life. Paul’s past was shameful. Not only did he assist in Stephen’s death, but Paul persecuted and imprisoned Jesus’ followers. God didn’t leave him alone but reached out and changed Saul into Paul. And Paul found help and freedom. He writes, “... *the Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but that very Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words*” (Romans 8:26, MSG). God’s grace heals us, even when we can’t name our hurt.

³ [How to Break Free of Limiting Beliefs | Guideposts](#)

Finally, no one rejects you but you. When you look at the photograph of Dr. Eger, you can't see a trace of the trauma and challenges of her life. She takes care of herself. Self-care is important, because loving yourself is part of what we're meant to do, the way God loves us.

Jesus said, “Love your neighbor as yourself” (Matthew 22:39).

Yes, we are to love others. But love can only have depth and authentic meaning when we love ourselves. Trying to love someone else while loathing or blaming ourselves is stilted. Our well-intended actions come across as false. When we know we are God's child, loved and cared for, with great value, we are more able to see the same qualities in others. God pardons and forgives; we can too.

The antidote to the fear that binds us in a pot is truth: first with ourselves, then with God and finally with others. It's okay to admit you have insecurities. We all do. Sharing them is part of the process of healing, being transplanted, being part of a community of trust and care. Dr. Eger advises us to listen to criticism respectfully but don't let others' evaluations define you. She says, “You weren't born with shame. You were born with love and joy and passion, and you can rewrite your internal script and reclaim your innocence. You can become a whole person.”⁴

I hope you find these tools helpful as we begin our journey to the cross and the empty tomb. They work for me and I believe they will help you. I invite you to spend time reflecting on whatever it is that limits and binds you. Please come back and join us next week as we explore the next step on our spiritual journey: “Transplanting is Risky.” I'll look for you then.

May you know the love of Christ, which pardons and heals, today and every day.

⁴ *Ibid*

Romans 11:13-18 (MSG)

But I don't want to go on about them. It's you, the outsiders, that I'm concerned with now. Because my personal assignment is focused on the so-called outsiders, I make as much of this as I can when I'm among my Israelite kin, the so-called insiders, hoping they'll realize what they're missing and want to get in on what God is doing. If their falling out initiated this worldwide coming together, their recovery is going to set off something even better: mass homecoming! If the first thing the Jews did, even though it was wrong for them, turned out for your good, just think what's going to happen when they get it right!

Behind and underneath all this there is a holy, God-planted, God-tended root. If the primary root of the tree is holy, there's bound to be some holy fruit. Some of the tree's branches were pruned and you wild olive shoots were grafted in. Yet the fact that you are now fed by that rich and holy root gives you no cause to gloat over the pruned branches. Remember, you aren't feeding the root; the root is feeding you.