

GONE TO SEED: THE PROMISE OF SPRING

When we hear the phrase “gone to seed” we almost always think of a derogatory meaning. However, it is a phrase that bears life-giving properties. For over 3 decades, our family has taken the Bluebonnet Trail up through Chapel Hill, Washington-on-the-Brazos, Brenham and back home in the springtime. We also enjoy the wildflowers when we travel up through Big Sandy to my dad and mom’s grave in Hawkins, Texas. Dad loved spring and Texas wildflowers. So when we drive through the flowers, we touch beauty, history and family.

Years ago when our kids were little, we heard a park ranger at Washington-on-the-Brazos plead with all the little kids running through the wildflower fields to stop, carefully about-face and softly walk between the flowers without stepping, lying or sitting on them. He kindly said, “If you crush them now, they won’t go to seed. And if they don’t go to seed, we will not have bluebonnets here next year.” Bluebonnets are annuals, not perennials. The perennials come from the same plant and although they lose their flower and go dormant, come spring, they bloom again. The annuals must die every year if you are to see their kind in the green fertile fields next year. The wildflower must die and fall apart in total deterioration. In this deteriorated state, it produces the seeds for next year. In other words, it stops producing flowers and starts producing seeds. If it is crushed and dies prematurely, it will not produce the seed. Jesus said, “Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone: but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit” (John 12:24).

Jesus said in John 12:25, “He that loveth his life shall lose it....” Unless we, like wildflowers, go to seed, we will fail to reproduce the life of Christ within us and multiply the witness around the world.

1. We fail to go to seed because we cannot resist temporary gratification of the moment.

Large portions of fields in the park at Washington-on-the-Brazos are roped off to keep children and some parents out of the bluebonnet growth. Over the years, many, in irresistible compulsiveness, have picked the delicate flowers while in beautiful full bloom. This is two-fold destructiveness. First, the flower will not last until you get back to Houston. It will shrivel and fall over. Secondly, the stem from which the flower was plucked will never produce another flower and the seeds the flower would have provided for future growth are gone forever.

When we cannot resist fleeting temptation and surrender we lose so much! We lose fellowship with the Lord, the pleasure of knowing we are in the will of God, effectiveness as a witness and future reward in heaven. “For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now if any man build upon this

foundation gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, stubble; Every man's work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is. If any man's work abide which he hath built thereupon, he shall receive a reward" (I Corinthians 3:11-14). The Bible tells us that if we should pick the flower of temptation, our service rendered is in jeopardy of being lost. Future rewards will flame out like wood, hay and stubble. The contrast is apparent: the gold and silver are not destroyed by fire, but are, in fact, purified. The good that we do in Jesus' name will not only last beyond our lives, but we will be examined by the holy eyes of our Lord. The Bible reminds us, "His eyes were as a flame of fire..." (Revelation 19:12a). The Lord told the lukewarm Laodicean church, "Because thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked: I counsel thee to buy of me gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich..." (Revelation 3: 17, 18a). The holy life is not only tried by fire but made better by the fires. The holy and dedicated apostle Paul said, "But I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection: lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway" (I Corinthians 9:27).

2. All life from the flowering plant must be gone before it goes to seed.

In the natural process after the blooming is done, the flowering plant dries, shrivels, and falls beneath the blades of grass. No one will come by and compliment it anymore. No more cameras pop out to capture the different hues of blue. It provides no temptation to anyone; it is dead. Dead flowers go unnoticed, unheeded and unappreciated, except to the horticulturalist, who knows what is happening. There is a natural process that only the patient farmer will appreciate. Jesus said, "For the earth bringeth forth fruit of herself; first the blade, then the ear, after that the full corn in the ear. But when the fruit is brought forth, immediately he putteth in the sickle, because the harvest is come" (Mark 4:28, 29).

There is a painting that I see from time to time that personifies much of our pop culture world. It is a fifties-style diner illuminated in an eerie glow on an intersection of two deserted downtown streets. Behind the counter is Elvis Presley laughing while serving an equally joyous Marilyn Monroe, sitting next to a melancholy Humphrey Bogart and on the adjoining counter sits James Dean with a haunted smile. The name of the painting is Boulevard of Broken Dreams. All seem to die before their allotted time, having chased their dreams to the fullest with all the gusto and material amenities surrounded by a plethora of acquaintances. Make this contrast: David Brainerd, Ann Hasseltine Judson, Jim Elliot and Robert Murray McCheyne. These missionaries died even younger than the afore mentioned list of celebrities. One major difference - their dreams lived on. These young missionaries did not leave a legacy of broken dreams and broken lives but everywhere they went they left life and the seeds of the Word of God--Brainerd to the American Indian, Judson to Burma, Elliot to the Auca Indians of South America and McCheyne to

Israel. The inspiration they have given to others decades and even hundreds of years after their deaths have allowed dreams to live on. They completely died to self. They went to seed, and their seed has not been broken; it lives on.

3. The plant that has gone to seed is lifted by the wind.

In our pilgrimages on the Bluebonnet Trail, I believe the most fascinating aspect of the Texas bluebonnet is the transient quality of this flowering life. I remember talking to one of the rangers at the park and asked, "Sir, where did the flowers go? They filled this field last year." He then pointed to a distant field beyond a small forest of trees and explained, "The wind blew the bluebonnets in this direction." The seeds of the emaciated dead bluebonnets carrying the potential life were so light, that the wind effortlessly lifted and carried them to distant fields, awaiting a resurrection in the spring. The parallels are inescapable. When we die to self, we become light enough to be carried by the wind. And we need to be reminded of this as Paul said in I Corinthians 15:31c, "...I die daily."

I read recently of a missionary who had taken much of his precious belongings with him to the mission field. While on his journey, some unfriendly natives stole most all of his possessions in the night. The next day he joyously recorded, "Having been freed from my great load, we were able to travel much more effortlessly." Ah, this is a man unattached to the world. This is a man ready to fly to the fields to which he is called.

"And suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting" (Acts 2:2). The Holy Spirit lifted these "dead" and emptied-of-self disciples into Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and the uttermost parts of the earth. Are we dead enough to fly? Have we gone to seed?

As we look into the fields that once held the blue glory of the wildflowers, be not sad; they shall resurrect, perhaps in a different field, but these dead seeds will not return void (Isaiah 55:11).

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Johnny Pope". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a long horizontal line extending to the right.