Encounters in the Garden: An Ethnography

ABSTRACT

Community Gardens and urban Farmers’ Markets seek to practice “beloved community” as Christian scripture describes. Theological understandings of beloved community embody both utopic and heterotopic natures: heterotopically, the gardens and markets target “food deserts” and generate sustainable ideals in the midst of dystopic concerns. Such gardens and markets evolve as temporary festive sites that benefit the health, safety, and cultural capital of surrounding communities. Methodologically, I engage an auto-ethnographic approach by citing the enterprises of two congregations that I have called home: the George Washington Carver Garden at Trinity United Church of Christ in Chicago, Illinois, plus the garden and market at Ktizo UCC in Phoenix, Arizona, as my archive. As the past Associate Pastor for Drama Ministries and the Green Committee at Trinity, I collaborated in the genesis of the garden, including the Farmers’ Market hosted in that space. I worshipped at Ktizo during graduate school in Arizona. My personal field notes, participant observation, and interviews with garden and market partners at both congregations, comprise the research. I engage Christian scripture as an archive that articulates utopic intentionality and potentiality to describe the heterotopia that faith-based community gardens and farmers’ markets provide.

PAPER

Jesus tells nearly forty parables in the canonical gospel texts, and roughly twenty-five of them arguably conjure relations of sowing, tending, harvesting, or feasting. Currently, a proliferation of contemporary churches, and urban congregations in particular, plant gardens and sponsor farmers’ markets to work toward building the “kingdom of God,” or “beloved community,” which I parallel with utopia. These gardens and markets engage the agrarian abundance characteristics of utopia as written by Thomas More and other early utopians, reflect Michel Foucault’s concept of heterotopia, and additionally carve festival sites and states as David Guss describes.

Today’s faith-based community gardens and farmers’ markets “re-mix” yesterday’s soup kitchens: they meet the needs of those suffering the injustices of food insecurity and food deserts. They serve those who are hungry and those who lack access to fresh produce where they live, and thus the gardens and markets address kingdom of God concerns. My seminary training and experience as a minister in the United Church of Christ taught me that hopes of utopic reality historically lay in the social gospel kingdom of God theology of the early 1900s, which worked toward building a just society and served the needs of the poor. Given contextual commitments to inclusive language, people of faith also describe “kingdom of God” as “beloved community.” “Beloved community” sets aside hierarchy and gender, and retains the sound theology of humanity as Christ’s “beloved.”

‘Utopia,’ however, is not a word that my faith-based context would use. Humanity in Christian tradition presumes and accepts its intrinsic imperfection, and believes that its efforts require Divine activity to fully achieve. Even so, shared harvesting, feeding, agriculture and nature’s abundance are the primary markers of beloved community, of the kingdom of God here on earth, and these are likewise a thread through the writings of early utopians. Church gardens and farmers’ markets pursue like aspirational harmony, so for ethnographic comparison, I embrace the term.
I also embrace that I produce here what anthropologist George Marcus calls a “messy text” (Marcus, 389): as an ethnographer, I embrace relativities that erase boundaries. Marcus argues that the post-modern ethnographic approach “deterritorializes culture” (389) such that formerly incommensurable areas of study suddenly dialogue, compare, and compete. In this case, if faith, cooking, grocery shopping, gardening, recipe sharing, and eating qualify as performable cultural practices—and here, as auto-ethnographer, I argue that they do—then the lens through which I analyze the utopic, heterotopic, and festive properties of the Trinity United Church of Christ Farmers’ Market and George Washington Carver Garden in Chicago, Illinois links and supports my “incommensurables.”

In addition to theorists More, Foucault, Guss, and others, I mine the archive of my own employment as Associate Pastor for Drama Ministries and the Green Committee at Trinity UCC for five years, recent field work in the form of participant observations at gardens supported by Ktizo UCC, which is my local congregation in Arizona, and five interviews that I conducted to supplement my personal experiences: three with Trinity members, and two with Ktizo gardeners. The Trinity interviews share evolutions of the garden and market since I left, and the Ktizo interviews supply history and genesis. Four of the five interviewees are my elders, invested in my journey as a student and as a minister, so I have the fortune to find them forthcoming. The interviews also supply valuable point-of-view beyond my own.

I acknowledge my power as a minister in my ethnography. Though I was one of six Associate Pastors and not at all “in charge” of the congregation, I operated with the authority of the Senior Pastor’s vision as a driving force. Rev. Dr. Otis Moss, III supplied the Green Bible as a tool as we cultivated a Green Committee in 2008. The sacred text opens with St. Francis of Assisi’s “Canticle of the Creatures” and contains writings from the likes of Archbishop Desmond Tutu as contributors in the Foreword, Introduction, and framing articles that celebrate how the edition honors Creation. The bible is a “green letter” version, with earth- and eco-justice related scriptures printed in green ink.

My location also means that I recognize echoes of scripture in the writings of More, Thommaso Campanella, and The Land of Prester John. I particularly identify parabolic principles common to the texts that the gardens and markets exemplify. I share the full text of two parables briefly below. Both highlight the growth activity that expands and spreads beyond the human agency and activity.

_The Parable of the Mustard Seed_ (Mt. 13:31-32, NRSV; Mk. 4:30-32; Lk. 13:18-19)

31 The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed that someone took and sowed in his field; 32 it is the smallest of all the seeds, but when it has grown it is the greatest of shrubs and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and make nests in its branches.”

_The Parable of the Growing Seed_ (Mk 4:26-29, NRSV)

26 He also said, “The kingdom of God is as if someone would scatter seed on the ground, 27 and would sleep and rise night and day, and the seed would sprout and grow, he does not know how. 28 The earth produces of itself, first the stalk, then the head, then the full grain in the head. 29 But when the grain is ripe, at once he goes in with his sickle, because the harvest has come.”

The utopic visioning in community gardens is in fact to plant seeds that spread and have impact, sustainably empowering people to have greater health and to become better stewards of
The parables above, seeds expand beyond what the sowers could imagine, and with magnitude requiring that the sower acknowledge that the growth and impact are beyond her or his human power; beyond “credit where credit is due” or “self-made” or “pull yourself up by your bootstraps” American dream, protestant ethic, capitalist spirit illusions. The two parables imply abundance, availability, and welcome without effort, reflecting the overflowing lands of early utopic visioning (Claeys and Sargeant).

The longer Laborers in the Vineyard parable (Matthew 20:1-16) dynamically exemplifies the practice of abundance. The wealthy landowner hires people to work in his fields periodically throughout a single day and with each group, agrees to pay each person the “usual daily wage”—even those he hired at five in the evening. The workers who were hired early morning find this equal distribution unfair, given that they labored for many hours longer than the five o’clock crew. The parable implies that (1) the landowner is free to give generously, (2) the limiting mortal desire for proportional distribution negates the abundance available, and (3) the latecomers would have worked all day if only someone had hired them earlier in the day, and thus calls for empathy to those who are unemployed but would like to work. In social justice tradition, the parables invert and subvert dominant cultural and economic operations that Jesus encounters. Likewise, I argue that parishioners at Trinity and Ktizo seek to experience parable activity to invert and subvert the dominant societal operations that they too encounter.

Biblical scripture undergirds my archive. This ethnography asks the reader to accept that across time and place, sacred text serves as ethical canon, a manual for societal structure, legal instruction, medical document, and economic compass. I submit that Jesus embedded utopic vision in parables. Jesus explains to the disciples (Matthew 13:10-16) that the mystery of the kingdom of God, the complexity of a present and yet “not-yet” community is so available while not-yet attained, and requiring greater commitment and giving of self than is readily fathomable, so he uses parables to do what we express as “make it plain” in response with the sermon.

The parabolic in fact implies the unattainability—of comprehending, and of concretizing, the beloved community. Scott, in Hear Then the Parable, expresses his own dilemma in exegeting the parables. The exposition itself, he says, substitutes something that is not parable for that which is (Scott, xi). In this regard, then, the parables express striving for utopia while acknowledging that humanity cannot realize it [except with Divine activity, and here is where the faith vision departs from the secular], which reflects the fictional nature attributed to utopic dreaming. The one gospel text that does not involve parables, the book of John, ends with a story of the resurrected Christ appearing to the disciples along the seashore as they fish in their boats. When they return, Jesus has cooked breakfast. He asks Peter three times if he loves him. Each time, Peter says, “Yes, you know I do.” And Jesus responds, each time, “If you love me, feed my sheep.” Here, in this charge, Jesus transforms the dominant parabolic symbols into the specific task of making sure that people have food. All investment, ownership, and forgiveness serve the purpose of growing food and feeding others.

The George Washington Carver Garden at Trinity United Church of Christ spans 423 – 450 W. 95th Street in Chicago, Illinois. The garden itself is gated, but has open-gate hours. It has the utopic characteristic of being within a [semi] protected space: a few square blocks that include the church, its properties, and the immediate residential streets are uncontrolled spaces amidst two major gang territories: Gangsta Disciples and Almighty Black P-Stones. This locale makes it all the more necessary for Paula Anglin, Master Gardener, to connect with people passing by on foot and let them know that they are welcome in the garden. And there are passers-
by, since 95th street is a major thoroughfare along the route of at least seven buses and three separate commuter trains for the city and suburbs. The garden and church sit on one side of train tracks that has very modest middle class homes, while across the tracks are even more modest homes, and Lowden Homes Housing Development, where the church has built a neighborly relationship and sponsored activities.

In utopic fashion, the gardening engages the wider community in labor, and also shares the harvest with those who did not. The Carver Garden and the Farmers’ Market deliberately reach back to a past agrarian time. In interviews with the New York Times, elders recall childhoods of farming with grandparents in the south, and then migrating north with parents to urban areas (Freedman). Several farmers are retired workers from professions such as bank security and teaching, who now culturally and economically recover a past way of life; recover the lost “privilege” of growing and eating healthy, fresh food. Simultaneously, the garden and market look forward to a future time, painting images of an after-life as well as an improved human experience that is more holistic for both physical and spiritual health. The garden and the market at Trinity UCC thus operate along utopic dimensions of time.

The garden has as a goal, as Green Committee Co-Chair Deacon Adrienne Wynn reminded me, of being available to passers-by even when the gates are closed. In 2009, we planted strawberries and sunflowers along the fence so that people might reach in and take them, according to scriptural laws in the Hebrew bible that prohibit harvesting the outer corners of fields (Leviticus 23:22). The scripture resonated with me for years because it requires that landowners leave gleaning the corners of the fields to the poor and foreigners in the community. Unfortunately, we later learned that the sun wasn’t right to grow the strawberries along that northern boundary. Still, the garden had the social architecture intended to transform relationships, spaces, and local economy, and it evolved to embody this scripture.

Contemporarily, how food gets to the table and into mouths is more and more monopolized through modernization, and here I find both Foucault and Guss helpful. Performable rituals of planting, harvesting, preparing, and eating must adapt. The transformations that the gardens and markets seek make them heterotopic spaces that create contextual contrast and juxtapositions as Foucault describes: even to specify an “urban garden” implies something oxymoronic. Trinity’s Carver Garden disrupts surrounding infrastructures. Likewise, Ktizo stewards gardens in Phoenix that also echo the 16th century religious radicalism, operate within an eschatological dimension of time, and embody heterotopia on the southern end of downtown.

Both St. Vincent De Paul and Andre House are missions buried within warehouse districts in downtown Phoenix. Andre House, a shelter for men, and the Phoenix Human Resources department share a space where St. Vincent De Paul manages the dining room, and it appears to be almost literally in the middle of a train yard. This is the location of Ktizo’s first garden venture with St. Vincent De Paul. The Catholic mission has two other satellites, and at one of those, I conducted participant observation and assisted primary gardener Jim Dennis and community partner Tony Kasowski with composting. The visual contrast of “urban garden” is sharp in the Ktizo gardens, for there are no residences nearby. At 4th and Watkins, St. Vincent De Paul has a campus of several acres, houses a clothing program, outdoor bathrooms, and a daycare center with a clearly new and impressive injury-free playground. It sits, however, amongst tire, car, and truck junkyards and/or repair—it becomes difficult to distinguish which.
The garden, tucked away a two-block walk behind the main facility on Watkins Street, is just one and a half blocks away from being under the I-17 highway. It rises like an outer-space freeway in a Jetsons cartoon, looming anachronistically behind and above fledgling fruit trees and leafy green Swiss chard. Jim Dennis gardens at this site now, because the goal of the Ktizo garden program is only the genesis: the team initiates, teaches, and trains, so that each site can maintain and self-sustain on its own. The hope for the South 9th Avenue site was, like the goal of the Trinity UCC Carver Garden, to grow food for the kitchen to use in serving. Gardening ideally saves kitchens money and serves healthier foods to those in need. The other goal on South 9th was to employ men who live in the shelter at Andre House. But, according to Jim, the process required “too many committees. They got a committee for everything!” and Tony Kasowski seconded. The bureaucratic red tape, both argued, impeded the visions for employment that they hoped the garden could create. Both men shared alternative methods of “hiring” the men they had trained when they had occasion, and have their eyes on land they would farm together, privately, to work toward the goal of employing homeless men.

Another bureaucratic employment example that Jim offered was of a friend who teaches Horticulture to the special needs class at a Phoenix-area high school. He wanted to hire them for summer gardening, but the school would not fund the program. So, instead, the students raised baby chicks during the academic year, sold the adult chickens at twenty-five dollars apiece, and essentially raised the money to pay themselves to have summer jobs (Dennis). All five of the interviews offered examples of such inversions or circumventions of power. Deacon Rose Scott disclosed strategies for cooking classes and tastings that managed to fall under food licensing through partnerships, such as with Soul Vegetarian Restaurant in Chicago, or by moving segments of programs indoors to be covered under the church’s kitchen license.

Tony (Kasowski) discussed composting as another bureaucratic issue, as did Miss Paula, as I call her. Miss Paula contends that with 6500 members, if each household and the church kitchen even only brought coffee grounds and teabags alone, the compost would be rich: visually attractive and pleasantly aromatic (Anglin). Tony has pursued a public works approach and tried thus far unsuccessfully to get the city to devise plans for composting waste from various sites. He is aware that he will have to create the steps for them, but he has found avenues (that he will not disclose!) to circumvent regulations.

Tony partners with a natural juice company in Scottsdale and picks up their pulp every few days. We unloaded eleven five-gallon paint buckets of pulp from his station wagon: apple, carrot, pomegranate, orange, and more. Tony loved the textures and feel, and urged me and other helpers to thrust our hands in to experience it. “Just call me the juice pulp pimp,” he said. “You know, I’ll be over at someone’s house, and I’ll see them start to throw a banana peel in the trash, and I’m like, ‘Whoa there, buddy, just you hang on a minute now!’” Tony exemplifies “passionate about the earth,” which is how Deacon Wynn described the gardeners at Trinity. In fact, Tony is listed as one of five local growers to watch on Instagram here in Phoenix (Crowley).

The anachronisms, or oxymorons—or some other word I have yet to find for that last sentence—aren’t lost on me (and I don’t know how to Instagram at all). Tony, who yells at friends for throwing out fruit peel, who trains homeless men to farm and garden, hikes around the metro area hunting for compost, gardens under a major interstate freeway, and then Instagrams his work. In full disclosure, Tony also gardens and landscapes for money to support his not-for-profit habits. But I think Guss would value Tony’s Instagram evidence and his
mention in the *Phoenix New Times* as a prime example of how the transplanting of festive performance, which in this case is a harvest ritual, from rural to urban space, subverts how and who “owns” gardening knowledge and production sites. The celebratory presentation is in part technological, embodying a festive state principle that Guss calls “multilocality” (Guss 131).

Mrs. Monica Brown Moss (the “First Lady” in black church tradition) was a major force behind the market and garden at Trinity UCC. A *New York Times* interview and the church’s *Empowering Voices* podcast reveal her passion for cultural knowledge and cultural production surrounding food as a justice issue. Mrs. Moss voices the deep disadvantages that the neighboring community suffers from lack of access to healthy and fresh food choices. She mentions that eighty percent of Chicago Public School children receive free or reduced lunch, and that one in six qualify as “food insecure.” Thus, the TUCC market accepts SNAP benefits (federal food stamp program). The benefits provide double dollars: each benefit dollar offers twice the purchasing power at a farmers’ market. Mrs. Moss describes the farmers market as “visible, and it gives people access to healthy foods.”

Mrs. Moss and Deacon Wynn both discussed the need to explain why the market is a better choice for shopping, even though some produce items cost more than at the places where neighbors shop—which are typically big box stores on the outskirts of the city. Deacon Wynn builds an economic argument and explains to attendees that the farmers are making their entire living off their land, and so shoppers cannot expect to receive bulk, corporate prices. She underscores that the church does not make any money from the market: the entire purpose is to support the farmers and the dietary needs of the community. The church tracks the zip codes of the shoppers, so Wynn and Scott both attest to the increased attendance of residents of the neighborhood at the market. Mrs. Moss explains pricing with emotional and physical appeal: “There is so much food waste globally because we transport food so far. Eating locally, eating what is grown within a two-hundred mile radius makes such a difference to our economy and to our bodies but it also empowers farmers—farmers who are the heart, the heartland of America. Farmers who have such a noble, hard job…toiling away for us, so that we can have the benefit of the land.” She later goes on to say, “When we start to realize how much food we waste, how many people could be fed by what we waste, we start being better stewards; change our conscience…it would bring us closer to God” (Moss).

Our partnership with our farmers began when, in December of 2008, Pastor Moss appointed Deacon Adrienne Wynn and me as co-chairs to cultivate a Green Committee, with the garden and market as initial projects. We established a Green Page in the weekly church bulletin, which Deacon Rose Scott now maintains, to offer Green tips to the congregation—recycling, conservation, composting, reuse, etc. At a cultural arts fair, we met founders of Black Oaks Center for Sustainable Living: a married couple of a naturopathic medical doctor and a farmer, who farmed and taught sustainable practices on their acres in Pembroke Township, Illinois, about one hour south and east of Chicago.

The Pembroke – Hopkins Park community has a legendary history that includes an older man escaping enslavement in North Carolina with somewhere between eight and eighteen of his children, walking across the country, and settling there. Historically the community has had periods of thriving, but has always struggled with the political agendas, corporate monopolies, and licensing hoops that consistently plague any small business, and particularly minority ones. The most prevalent and understandable challenge for small farmers is the paperwork and expense of receiving federal permissions to call food “organically grown”—so they use the
language of “pesticide free.” Black Oaks Center, with educated leaders and multiple streams of income, created a cooperative partnership that covered thirteen of the Pembroke-Hopkins Park farms, eliminating the steps that were cumbersome for some, and rendering all within legal codes. This umbrella was a gift. To build the partnership, I personally went out to the farm for workdays, learning to create compound with mud and hay that would build additional edifices for teaching on the site and to build a bridge over a small stream of water. The farmers also came to the 95th Street site to help the church plant its first harvest. A third organization, Faith in Place, which ecumenically helps diverse faith-based institutions Reduce, Reuse, and Recycle, helped both Trinity and Black Oaks Center access further resources.

Black Oaks Center was attractive to other institutions in the city as well, and in 2010, the second year of Trinity’s market, the collective began to serve markets across multiple communities. Sustaining Trinity’s market evolved to partner with individual farmers—some from that collective, others who were independent. Deacon Rose Scott reports that after that dip in 2010, the market has gradually increased to the original magnitude, and has also expanded to include other vendors. Deacon Scott, as well as Mrs. Moss, Miss Paula, and Deacon Wynn, all report the garden and market experience as one that I argue is a festival every Saturday, July through October.

The garden is named for George Washington Carver, African American nutritionist, food scientist, and innovator of farming technology. The Green Committee engaged the Artists in Residence ministry to work with youth and paint a mural on the street-facing north wall of the storage sheds that separate the garden and the parking lot where the market serves. Zumba classes are held every Saturday at Trinity anyway, and the session relocated outside at the market. “The music is pumpin’, it’s upbeat, and you easily have two hundred people out there,” reports Miss Paula. “One time I looked up from the garden, and two white girls were there dancing in the back!” Her account attests to the visibility of the market from the street, and the transformation of the lot into a festive space. Observations of diversity express that the festival environment attracts participants who typically are absent from the neighborhood, and celebrates that entry. Intentionally, and in line with a congregation whose motto is “Christ, Community, and Culture,” the market and the garden celebrate the recovery of cultural knowledge and the transmission of that knowledge in a new space and time.

When we began the initial planning for the Carver Garden and the TUCC Farmers’ Market, Deacon Wynn had a constant refrain: “Rev. Tiffany, what are we going to do about iceberg lettuce?” For her, iceberg lettuce was a “pet project;” the microcosmic, parabolic symbol of all that was wrong with the community’s food choices. Iceberg lettuce, completely lacking in nutrients as far as she was concerned, was our people’s inexpensive, uninformed, “go-to” attempt at transformation. She proudly reports that the garden grows romaine and mixed greens—no iceberg lettuce. Her goals now are larger scale. “My vision is that every week, for the market to be bustling; for people to have the desire for more and more fresh food; for more African American farmers all over the nation to make a living and support themselves…that we educate people to the true benefits of eating from the earth.”

To truly transform dietary habits, the market in fact must achieve festive state every week. The experience must be out of the ordinary, and the temporality must build desire to attend, or the community will make other grocery choices elsewhere. Deacon Wynn describes that the produce aesthetically contributes to the festival experience. Of the produce from a farmer with a plot in the neighborhood at 96th and Vincennes, she says, “Rev. Tiffany, you
should have seen his greens—they LOOKED like utopia! They are absolutely incredible. They look so perfect!” For its own sustainability, the market must conjure a festive experience that makes people return. Persons already attending weekly support the market because the experience is one set apart from the rest of daily life.

The Garden has also become a site of specifically scheduled festive activity as well (Anglin, email). For example, the Singles Ministry sponsored the Garden Jubilee. “Jubilee” is a biblical term that means after 50 years, all debts are forgiven, and families can return to the lands that their ancestors owned. Jubilee was a biblical economic justice strategy, such that then families would not lose their land and wealth for endless generations—their communities would not have a “1%” that retained wealth in an ever-increasing gap. In this case, the garden becomes a meeting spot for singles in the congregation. Trinity UCC was celebrating its 50th Anniversary since the founding of the parish. The ministry transplanted and divided perennial plants into 50 parts to donate to 50 spaces (gardens, shelters, food pantries, soup kitchens) around the city. The church particularly donates to the service organizations in its “Christmas is not your birthday” roster.

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The Singles’ Ministry also sponsors the TUCC “Hallelujah Party” for youth, and in 2010, began the pumpkin carving celebration in the garden with pumpkins grown in the garden. Many churches that want to create a festive space for children whose parents aren’t comfortable celebrating the demons and ghouls of Halloween. Furthermore, in places like Chicago, parents may be fine with the fun of Halloween, but are not sure where children may safely go trick or treating. The garden has become part of the celebration, since (a) growing pumpkins is part of the harvest, and (b) Deacon Adrienne Wynn, co-chair of the Green Committee, loves pumpkin carving “like she’s ten years old.” Thus, the garden has created additional service opportunities for a ministry that simultaneously engage a festival spirit.

The congregation has also staged Commemorative events in the Garden space (Anglin, email). First, the congregation processed from the sanctuary after worship services one Sunday to have a dedication ceremony of the mural painted by the artists and a team of youth. Second, to commemorate the life of a pastor, the congregation dedicated the Rev. Barbara J. Allen Monarch Butterfly Garden. The garden won a grant from the US Department of Forestry partnered with Faith in Place that included donations of milkweed plants, which are the only place that Monarch Butterflies will lay eggs, and to which they return every year. Rev. Allen always loved and wore butterflies, and now the Garden honors her memory. Thirdly, the woman who founded the TUCC Yoga Ministry continued to lead it for over thirty years, for free, every Saturday morning at 7:30 am for “whosoever will” until she died well into her eighties, and her first name was Rosalia. The ministry thus planted a rose garden to honor Miss Rosalia’s commitment to health. With each honoring, a festival moment occurred with music, dance, and prayer celebration. The Yoga ministry weekly comes to the garden during the market months to hold devotion, which consists of song, prayer, scripture, and sharing, before or after their weekly exercise.

The festival opportunities and the technologies reflected in the garden and market mirror the respatialization that Guss attributes to festive discourse across communities (Guss 133). The festive state conjured weekly, July through October at Trinity further mirrors migrations that Guss describes, and offers the chance to produce new meanings, and reconfigure identities and relations. The more meanings produced, the more Foucault’s juxtapositions become evident in the spaces on 95th street. Alternative medicine, alternatives to gym memberships, alternatives to
mental health care, and sacred, welcome space amidst closed doors of access all highlight the festive and heterotopic qualities of the Carver Garden and the market.

Perhaps the best example of heterotopia is when the children from Vacation Bible School and the Freedom School come to the garden, as Miss Paula describes. “Their first question, every time, is ‘Can we eat it?!’ Before I can explain anything, give a tour—nothing, just ‘Can we eat it?!’ And so I just say yes and turn them loose. And without fail, the next question is ‘Can we plant something?’” Miss Paula describes that the last time, there wasn’t any space, yet she somehow found a corner for them to plant something. She always does; there always has to be room. The children are ready and eager to transform; they want to eat healthy things. This heterotopic space for many of the youth introduces them to the experience of picking and eating, and is and the only space where such options are available. She added raspberries and is praying fervently that a few donated fruit trees survive the winter, to maintain a harvest that the children can select and eat easily and immediately.

Freedom School students also painted the rain barrels that collect enough water to hydrate the roses and about a third of the rest of the garden (Anglin). Deacon Rose Scott reports that this past market season, a team of teenagers helped set up the market at SIX-THIRTY AM every Saturday morning! Anglin envisions rolling up the garage-like door on one of the shed spaces, erecting a stage, draping the walls in black, and inviting youth to perform spoken word, open mic, and music in the evenings. Deacon Wynn and Mrs. Moss imagine farming as a viable career choice for youth. Jim Dennis and Tony Kasowski seek to generate jobs for unemployed young men and special needs teens. The effort at inter-generationally transmitting the farming technologies and love of earth within urban centers leads me to call farming an art—a performed art, incommensurably, parabolically, and heterotopically juxtaposed with the economic and food injustice realities of a congregational garden practicing beloved community.

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1 The Parable of the Laborers in the Vineyard (Matthew 20:1-16 NRSV)

1 For the kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire laborers for his vineyard. 2 After agreeing with the laborers for the usual daily wage, he sent them into his vineyard. 3 When he went out about nine o’clock, he saw others standing idle in the marketplace; 4 and he said to them, ‘You also go into the vineyard, and I will pay you whatever is right.’ So they went. 5 When he went out again about noon and about three o’clock, he did the same. 6 And about five o’clock he went out and found others standing around; and he said to them, ‘Why are you standing here idle all day?’ 7 They said to him, ‘Because no one has hired us.’ He said to them, ‘You also go into the vineyard.’ 8 When evening came, the owner of the vineyard said to his manager, ‘Call the laborers and give them their pay, beginning with the last and then going to the first.’ 9 When those hired about five o’clock came, each of them received the usual daily wage. 10 Now when the first came, they thought they would receive more; but each of them also received the usual daily wage. 11 And when they received it, they grumbled against the landowner, 12 saying, ‘These last worked only one hour, and you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden of the day and the scorching heat.’ 13 But he replied to one of them, ‘Friend, I am doing you no wrong; did you not agree with me for the usual daily wage? 14 Take what belongs to you and go; I choose to give to this last the same as I give to you. 15 Am I not allowed to do what I choose with what belongs to me? Or are you envious because I am generous?’ 16 So the last will be first, and the first will be last.
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