

Second Sunday of Christmas
Vicar Thomas K. Holdcraft

Sunday, January 3, 2009
Trinity Evangelical Lutheran Church

Jeremiah 31:7–14; Psalm 147:12–20;
Ephesians 1:3–14; John 1: (1–9) 10–18

Cora Brittany Hill liked to show off her tattoo that was etched on top of her foot. It said, "12-24-2007 Erika." "That is the day I received a gift from my donor Erika, and the day she saved my life." Cora loved to explain. Cora had been born with cystic fibrosis and the doctors warned that she may not live past 7 years old. Though Cora was in and out of the hospital she was able to live an active life for 22 years. In 2007, however, her health began to fail and she was hospitalized at the Mayo clinic in need of a lung transplant. And that is when Erika saved her life. Erika was a young mother of 24, she died from a blood clot in her brain, but first she told her family that she wished her organs to be donated. Others received Erika's liver and kidneys and Cora received her lungs. The lungs gave Cora life and due to circumstances she was able to meet the daughter of her donor. "I wanted her to know what her mother's life meant to me," Cora said. But in November of 2009, things began to change. Cora's body had had enough. She communicated through written and mouthing words that she desired her ventilator to be shut-off. Cora and her mother agreed on the date, December 24, 2009. She died 42 minutes later after being removed from the ventilator. The date was exactly two years after the day of receiving her lungs.

Come with me to consider this account and how it makes us think in a different way about Jeremiah's prophecy. The Lord who scatters his people will gather them. "Their life shall become like a watered garden and they shall never languish again." Erika's gift of life is a different way to think about how our lives can be gardens that provide life to other people.

We know that gardens produce food that we need for survival. The soil, water and sunlight are required but also needed is planning, work, and sacrifice. The gardener must plan the organization of the garden. The types of food that will grow and space are needed. If you plant the seeds too close together the sprouts will crowd each other and not flourish. Work is needed for a garden. There is the turning over the soil. The earth is tilled in order to soften it to help the seeds take root. The work continues even after the crop begins to grow. The garden requires constant weeding and watering. And finally the crop needs harvesting. Food left on the vine will spoil and fall to the ground. This is some of the planning and work that is required to grow a garden. Do you remember the third need? The third is that of sacrifice. The notion of sacrifice is included in the planning and work of the garden.

The sacrifice of time is a real part in the care of the garden. There is the sacrifice of being in another place and of doing something else. Many people love to garden but there is always the distraction that one could be doing something else. There is the sacrifice of sweat from the work. There is the sore back, the dirt under the nails, and the muddy knees of your jeans. These sacrifices are real in the creation and

care of the garden, but the sacrifice that I want to talk about today is that sacrifice that one makes after the food has been harvested. The times after the baskets have been filled. What kind of sacrifice does the gardener make now? That is the time when the gardener knocks on the neighbor's door with an offering of food. Have you ever been the one to receive such an offering? Have you ever been the one to give such a sacrifice? Food from a personal garden is an amazing gift.

Well watered garden provide food. When your life is like a well watered garden; your life gives others life. How many here today know how much the sacrifices you make, end in giving life to others? How many here today want to make sacrifices that give life to others? When you life is like a well watered garden; your life gives others life.

There is a lovely book with the title ***The Story of Edgar Sawtelle***. Edgar is caring for a stray German shepherd. The dog lives in the woods, but appears to have memory of people. We aren't sure what his history is but Edgar is making peace with the dog by giving him food. The German shepherd is not immediately trusting Edgar however, so Edgar moves slowly. He begins by placing the food bowl just inside the woods, out of the sight of the house. The next day he moves the bowl 10 feet closer to the house, and so on. Until one day Edgar holds the scrap of food in his hand and the dog gets close enough to take it from Edgar directly before turning to run away. The animal is emaciated. Skin and bones. His coat is full of burs and matted. Edgar's father watches the exchange from the porch. Edgar is unable to talk and uses sign language to communicate. "Did you see him father," Edgar signs. "A full bred German Shepherd. And he emphasized to his father the word for beautiful. "Yes," his father said. "Give him a little food and he will be that too."

People are starving all over the world from lack of food and water. We recognize this and do a lot right here at Trinity. There is another type of starvation in the world. People are starving to be recognized as human beings. When one stops to notice the behavior of children and teenagers, one can often see that they are starving for attention. Starving for love and starving for someone to tell them that they can be successful. People need to be told that they can be successful at life and successful in giving other people life.

It is like the words that Edgar's father says, "Give him a little food and he will be beautiful, too." Food can be literal, we need food to live. Food can also be spiritual. This need for spiritual food is filled in the receiving of Holy Communion. Jesus Christ has given for you. Do we see that we are starving to hear those words? Do we recognize that we are also starving to say those words to people? People are starving to be recognized as human beings.

Your life shall become like a well watered garden. They are beautiful words that God speaks through Jeremiah. Words filled with hope for a people that are suffering. In 2007 Cora received hope from Erika's gift. Then on Christmas Eve, 2009, just a little over a week ago, Cora gave gifts of her own when she elected to be removed from the ventilator needed to keep her alive. She passed the gift of life

to others who are despairing. And we have hope that their lives too, will become like well watered gardens. Amen.