

Parable of the Healing Garden: Sin, Redemption and Community

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1 Disclaimer

This narrative is presented as a parable, inspired by Matthew 28:19-20, to explore themes of sin, redemption, and community in the spirit of Jesus' teachings. It seeks to reflect the principle conveyed in John 8:7, "Let he who is without sin cast the first stone." As you engage with this story, we encourage you to consider it in the light of 1 Thessalonians 5:21: "Test everything; hold fast what is good." We invite you to thoughtfully discern and embrace the elements of this parable that resonate with and enrich your understanding of Anabaptist faith and practice. However, it is important to critically evaluate any aspects that may seem to diverge from core Anabaptist beliefs and scripture. This narrative is offered as a tool for contemplation and spiritual growth, aiming to respect and reflect the diverse ways in which we live out our faith within our community, while remaining grounded in the teachings of Jesus and Anabaptist traditions.

2 Parable

In an Anabaptist food forest community, there lay a garden known as the Healing Garden, overseen by a wise elder gardener. This garden was a sanctuary where all were welcomed, embodying the teaching of Jesus, "Let he who is without sin cast the first stone" (John 8:7). In this space, the gardener nurtured not only plants but also the souls of those who entered, sharing wisdom that, like plants, people require care and understanding to flourish (Matt 28:19-20).

The garden became a living classroom where lessons of sin as a separation from God (Isaiah 59:2) and its impact on the commu-

nity (1 John 4:20) were gently imparted. The gardener encouraged a life of holistic living (Matthew 5:48) and personal accountability (James 2:17), always stressing the importance of humility and respect in interactions (Philippians 2:3).

Within this nurturing environment, each person embarked on a journey towards spiritual wholeness. Maria, a single mother, once judged by many, found a haven of compassion. Her story, interwoven with the teachings of Jesus' humble beginnings (Matthew 1:18-25), became a powerful testament to the transformative power of simplicity and community support (Matthew 20:26-28; Hebrews 13:16).

Tobias and Esther, a cohabiting couple, often marginalized for their lifestyle, discovered a space of acceptance and guidance. They were encouraged to reflect on their relationship through the lens of Jesus' teachings on love and inclusive fellowship (Luke 15:1-2), gaining respect and understanding within the community.

Jacob, grappling with addiction, found in the garden a place of refuge and support, mirroring the Christ-like approach of love and healing (Matthew 9:10-13). His journey of recovery, supported by the community, became a symbol of hope and renewal.

In this way, each individual in the Healing Garden, embraced by the community, learned to value themselves and others. They embodied the spirit of the garden: a place of empathy, growth, and mutual respect, where the teachings of Jesus on love, compassion, and community were lived out daily. This garden stood as a beacon of hope, demonstrating the profound impact of a community living in harmony with the teachings of Anabaptism and the words of Christ.

In the Anabaptist food forest community, the Healing Garden served not just as a refuge but as a vibrant center of spiritual activity and growth, deeply rooted in the principles of fellowship and the call to discipleship as outlined in Matthew 28:19-20. The garden's circles were integral to this mission, each playing a vital role in reaching out to the wider community and fostering church growth and planting.

Maria's 'Healing Family Biblestudy' extended beyond the confines of the garden, reaching out to the broader community. In-

spired by Jesus' teachings on servant leadership (Matthew 20:26-28), this circle engaged in activities that connected with families outside the garden, offering support, fellowship, and spiritual guidance. This outreach was a practical embodiment of the Great Commission, as the circle actively participated in expanding the church's influence and planting new faith communities.

Tobias and Esther's 'Biblestudy of Fellowship and Reflection' became a model for community engagement and growth. Through their work, they demonstrated how living in accordance with Jesus' teachings on love and community (John 13:34-35, Acts 2:44-47) could inspire others to join and enrich the church community. Their efforts contributed significantly to the garden's outreach initiatives, attracting individuals and families interested in exploring a faith journey grounded in acceptance and inclusive fellowship.

Jacob's 'Biblestudy of Recovery' reached out to those struggling with addiction in the wider community, reflecting the Anabaptist commitment to mutual aid and compassion (Galatians 6:2). This circle's work was not confined to the garden; it extended to local outreach programs, support groups, and church planting efforts, offering a path to recovery and spiritual renewal within the broader context of faith.

The Healing Garden, nestled within the Anabaptist food forest community, stood as a vibrant hub of spiritual activity and growth. Its fellowship structure, underpinned by a deep commitment to the teachings of Jesus, enabled it to function dynamically, fostering both church growth and spiritual expansion. At the heart of this structure was the anchor circle, comprising bishops, pastors, deacons, and trustees. This leadership team provided guidance and support, ensuring that each circle within the garden aligned with the broader mission of church planting and community outreach.

Maria, a young single mother who once faced challenges and isolation in her community, found transformation and companionship in the Healing Garden, a place of acceptance and growth. There, she met Samuel, a compassionate man deeply involved in community activities, with whom she shared a deep resonance of faith, values, and aspirations. Their friendship, which

blossomed over shared tasks in the garden and heartfelt discussions during community gatherings, deepened into a loving relationship, leading to a heartfelt marriage that brought joy and renewal to both their lives and the community. United in their journey, Maria and Samuel became active contributors to their community, organizing events and workshops to strengthen family bonds and support parents. Their home evolved into a warm and hospitable hub, reflecting their shared commitment to Anabaptist principles of simplicity, service, and community life. The pinnacle of Maria's spiritual journey was her baptism alongside Samuel, marking a new chapter of shared faith, love, and service, and standing as a testament to personal growth, the healing power of community, and the transformative love of God.

In this tranquil setting, the garden blossomed into a beacon of unity and peace, reflecting core tenets of Anabaptism. Community events became regular fixtures, serving as opportunities for fellowship and sharing, reminiscent of the practices of the early Christian church as described in Acts 4:32-35. These gatherings played a vital role in strengthening individual faith and deepening communal bonds, as members shared their experiences, wisdom, and support.

Tobias and Esther, as a cohabiting couple, initially grappled with their place within the Anabaptist community, which traditionally upholds marriage as the context for a committed partnership. Through reflective sessions in their 'Biblestudy of Fellowship and Reflection,' they grew to understand the importance of marriage in embodying their commitment to each other and to their faith. This understanding led to a beautiful wedding ceremony in the community, celebrated by all, and was followed by their joint baptism. Their marriage became a testimony to their journey of understanding love and commitment through the lens of their faith, bringing them into closer alignment with Anabaptist teachings.

The atmosphere of the garden was meticulously curated to embody the Anabaptist commitment to peace and brotherhood. Respectful and uplifting language permeated the space, echoing the directive from Ephesians 4:29 to use words that build others up. This choice of language fostered a nurturing environment for all who entered. Ad-

ditionally, a resource corner was established, offering a selection of materials that resonated with the Anabaptist perspective on community support and personal spiritual growth. This corner became a treasure trove of knowledge and inspiration for those seeking to deepen their understanding and practice of their faith.

Jacob's struggle with addiction was a journey of both personal and spiritual challenges. In the 'Biblestudy of Recovery,' he found a supportive space that was grounded in the Anabaptist ethic of mutual aid. The community's compassionate approach, coupled with faith-based counseling and support, guided him towards recovery. His transformation was marked by moments of vulnerability, strength, and ultimately redemption. Jacob's baptism was a poignant symbol of his new life, free from addiction, and his commitment to walking a path aligned with his faith. His story became an inspiration to others in the community, showcasing the power of grace and the strength of a supportive faith-based community.

After Maria and Samuel's marriage, the community organized a celebration that reflected the joy and unity of their union. This event, filled with communal singing, shared meals, and heartfelt testimonies, was a testa-

ment to the community's support and happiness for their new journey together.

Similarly, Tobias and Esther's decision to marry and join the church fully was met with guidance, love, and blessings from their peers and elders. Their wedding, a blend of traditional Anabaptist customs and personal touches, became a symbol of the community's ability to embrace and nurture relationships grounded in faith and commitment.

Jacob's recovery and subsequent baptism were milestones not only for him but for the entire community, which had supported him through his challenges. His baptism was a communal celebration, a reflection of the Anabaptist spirit of bearing one another's burdens and rejoicing in each other's victories.

Remaining true to the Anabaptist spirit of humility and continual spiritual learning, the garden was a living testament to the value of adaptation and growth. Following the wisdom of Proverbs 15:22, the community regularly sought advice and feedback, not only within their circles but also from the broader church community. This practice of open dialogue and receptiveness to new ideas ensured that the garden continually evolved, remaining a relevant and vital part of the community's spiritual journey.