

# Consider the Mushrooms

Isaiah 55:10-11; Matthew 6:25-34

Lethbridge Mennonite Church

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July 19, 2026/Eighth Sunday After Pentecost

Around twelve years ago, we built the house that we now call home in Coaldale.

A guy I played hockey with owned a lot with a run-down old house on it. He was subdividing it into two lots and putting up two new houses. He asked if we'd be interested in one of them. We were.

We were especially interested in the newly-created south lot as it would be the one that had a large tree. Not least because our bedroom would be on the second floor and the tree would provide shade in the summer.

For the first few years, it was great! The tree was wonderful. It was tall and strong. It was leafy and green in summer. It provided privacy. And, most importantly, shade for a house without air conditioning!

Gradually, however, we noticed our tree's leaves coming later and later. Then not at all. Eventually, it died.

We got the professionals out to cut it down. Naomi planted a new one in its place. She created a flowerbed all around it. It's now maybe something like a toddler tree. Green, leafy, strong. But not yet large enough to provide shade. It's getting there.

Shortly after we cut down our old dead tree, I noticed an irritating annual feature of spring and summer. Each year, usually after a few spring rains, mushrooms would start appearing in and around where that old tree was.

I hate mushrooms, whether they're in my food or on my lawn. Theologically, I know I'm supposed to say that God doesn't make mistakes, but mushrooms? Well, let's just say they test my theology.

(Naomi, inexplicably, like mushrooms! She even uses little mushroom ornaments to decorate our house. She seems not to care how this traumatizes me!)

At any rate, back to the mushrooms in my lawn. Sometimes they were little ones. Often they were large, ugly ones. Sometimes there were huge clusters of them. They pushed out of the soil or the grass, crowd out Naomi's flowers.

So, I did what any sane person would do. I googled, "How do you get rid of mushrooms in your lawn." I was looking for the nuclear option.

Surprisingly, it seems there is no such thing. You can spray some vinegar on them to make them recede. But no round-up for mushrooms!

So, for the last number of years I have been kind of living with these mushrooms. Sometimes I'll dig them out, leaving an ugly hole in the lawn or Naomi's flowerbed. Sometimes I'll comically tramp around the yard with a little vinegar spray bottle, full of righteous fury.

These mushrooms have been a thorn in my side for at least half a decade.

This past week's assignment, in our ongoing series "God's Shalom for our Common Home," urged us to "open your eyes in wonder to the cycles around you."

I read the texts assigned for this week. *Consider the lilies*, Jesus says.

I looked around my yard. I saw plenty of beautiful flowers, including, Naomi informed me this morning, some lilies.

But I didn't consider them. I decided to consider the mushrooms.

I can't say I did so with much wonder in my eyes. But I did decide (grudgingly) to try muster up at least a bit of curiosity to learn more about them.

I discovered there's a fair bit going on with these mushrooms besides just annoying me.

Those of you who know more about these things than I do (which may be roughly everyone), will know that they're obviously connected to that tree we removed.

Can you tolerate a few paragraphs of science? Here's what I learned in my online research:

After a tree is removed, much of it is still underground: roots, small wood fragments, and sometimes part of the stump. Those materials are mostly made of complex plant fibers such as cellulose and lignin.

Fungal threads, called mycelium, spread through the soil and into that wood. They release enzymes that break those tough fibers into simpler compounds the fungus can use for energy and growth. In the process, nutrients locked in the old tree gradually return to the soil.

**Most of the fungus stays hidden underground year-round.** When conditions are right—usually moist soil, mild temperatures, and plenty of remaining wood—it produces mushrooms. A mushroom is the fungus's reproductive structure, roughly like an apple on a tree: it releases microscopic spores that can travel and start new fungal colonies elsewhere.

**So the mushrooms are evidence of an ongoing underground recycling system.** They'll often recur for several years, until the remaining roots and wood are mostly decomposed.

Turns out, there was (and is) a lot going on under the surface of my lawn. A whole vast process involving things with scientific-sounding names, working together for the health of the soil.

It's pretty incredible. And it's one of countless examples in the world.

I still hate mushrooms on my lawn, but I'm hating them in a more appreciative way now :)

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Let's take things from the scientific to the spiritual. There's a fairly natural analogy here, one that I'm sure has already occurred to you.

In our world and in our lives, there is always hidden things going on beneath the surface.

God is at work, even when it may not look like it. Even when all you see is ugly mushrooms, God, in some mysterious way, has his own “underground recycling system” that is busy creating goodness, flourishing, harmony, and ultimately wholeness.

In our first passage today, Isaiah appeals to the hydrological cycle to remind weary exiles that the God who makes the rain and the snow fall to nourish the earth can do be trusted to keep his covenant promises.

God’s word will not return empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it.

Even though things may look bleak at the moment, hang on. Be faithful. Trust God. God has purposes for you and for this world.

And if God can bring something as impressive as the hydrological cycle into being, God can, presumably, be trusted to achieve what God wants in your life and in the story of the world.

In Matthew, Jesus is talking about worry. That’s a big one! We are wired for worry, it often seems.

Our worries can range from the intensely personal to the global, from the ecological to the political, from the material to the spiritual. There are so many things to worry about (and our media ecosystem, with all of it’s incentives, is determined to keep this ever before us so that we will keep on scrolling and clicking!)

To our worried hearts Jesus says, simply: Therefore I tell you, do not worry... Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to your life?

On the face of it, this seems rather unhelpful. “Don’t worry, you can’t control anything anyway!”

This is kind of just a restatement of the problem. Not having any control over things is actually one of the main reasons we worry. So thanks a lot, Jesus.

As I reread Matthew 6 this week, it occurred to me that Jesus probably wasn't saying that I shouldn't worry because the world is not a worrisome place. It is, obviously. And, equally obviously, it was in Jesus' day, too.

Jesus cannot be saying that we shouldn't worry because there aren't things worth worrying about.

As always Jesus is making a statement about the kinds of people that worrying turns us into.

Worrying turns us almost inevitably inward. Rather than being actively engaged in contributing goodness to the world around us, worry so often has a paralyzing effect.

Last week, Marie and I sat outside on a picnic table in a park and had a talk about this week's theme.

She talked about an idea she encountered from Stanley Hauerwas who talked about how Christians should seek to live in the world. He said that as Christians we are called not necessarily to be effective but to be faithful.

We cannot and will not solve every problem in the world, whether it's climate change or war or the toxicity of our cultural discourse or our faltering institutions. We are small and the problems in our world are very big.

Our little efforts to be faithful to Jesus in any of these areas may not amount to much. But they are still expressions of our desire to be faithful.

Marie also passed along an article by an environmental scholar who goes by the name of Joanne Moyer and who happens to be in attendance today.

The article touched on many themes, including the need for measurable effective political change. But she also advocated for a life of simplicity—riding a bike, consuming less, fixing rather than buying new, etc. Not because of any measurable effectiveness, but because she believes these to be responses of faithfulness:

And at a global scale, these practices do little to mitigate climate change or rebalance global economic inequalities. The trade-offs are always complex and tangled. **But, for me, beyond strategic problem solving, these simplicity**

**practices are expressions of faithfulness that give integrity to my educational endeavours, which is my primary way of engaging at the societal scale.** They are also proclamations of hope that are continuously inoculating me against despair and apathy, and they inspire me to continue striving.

What is true of our response to climate concerns is true in every area of our lives.

We seek to be faithful. We seek to live as God has called us to live, regardless of the “payoff.”

And we trust God with the outcomes.

I am convinced that this way of living can only proceed from a posture of trust. Trust in the God who rewards the faithful and who can bring about what our hearts most desire, in the world and in our lives.

And, to return to my mushrooms, we must remember that there is more going on than we know.

Behind all the bad news, there is a good God who is always working. Even when we can't see it. Even when there are countless market forces steering our attention toward what is broken instead of what is beautiful.

Under the surface, up over the horizon, all around us and within us... There is a kingdom coming. A kingdom worth seeking.

A kingdom that transcends all that makes us worried and afraid. It is this kingdom that Jesus says our Father has been pleased to give us, that we are invited to treasure above all else.

It is a kingdom that infects our worrisome world with hope, a kingdom that no pain or waste or decay can ever destroy.

Both our passages today are an invitation to trust in the One whose ways are higher than ours and who alone can bear the responsibility of the flourishing of all that he has made.

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I want to close with a quote that I've used before but fits well in the context of our worries—for creation and for ourselves. It applies at all levels.

I came across this quote at a Roman Catholic Retreat Centre least year before I headed out on my sabbatical. The source is unknown.

A cynic is prematurely disappointed in the future. A Christian sees the world as Christ sees it, which is to say, as redeemable.

I have this quote taped on the wall in my office so I see it every day.

Whether you are thinking about your own personal circumstances, or about climate change or about wars in Sudan, Ukraine, Iran, Lebanon, or whether you are feeling worried for the future of the church, or the coarse polarization of our social and political discourse, or what AI is going to do to our future...

Whatever may be causing you anxiety today, can I urge you to not be prematurely disappointed in the future?

Can I urge you to be a Christian today? To see the world as Christ sees it, which is to say, redeemable? In this life or in the next.

Can I urge you to consider the mushrooms? There are things going on that we can't see. God things. Things we are invited to participate alongside of.

God is the great recycler who can somehow take all that is and was and shall be, and weave it into a beautiful tapestry of redemption.

This is the hope to which we are called. And for it, we say, thanks be to God.

Amen.

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