

The land does not belong to us.

The land belongs to the first people of the **Calicus, Shawnee, Massawomeck.**

For 30 some odd years, St. Columba's Appalachia Project, famously known as **SCAP**, has traveled to this piece of stolen land in Barbour County, West Virginia, in hopes to serve the people by rebuilding, and remodeling homes.

To go on SCAP is to be a Scapper.

This years group of Scappers ranged from schools such as Georgetown Day School, Jackson Reed, St John's, Walt Whitman, Bethesda Chevy Chase and Benjamin Banneker to name a few.

So too we range in professions as adult leaders from clergy, teachers and scientist, mechanic, and government employees.

And the theme of the trip was Putting Down Roots.

On June 24th our wheels took off and we left the District through the rural and rolling green hills of Maryland and down the mountains onto the county roads of West Virginia.

These county roads of West Virginia took us to worshipping at a church which had not yet found its way to inclusion and has not yet critiqued its own whiteness.

These country roads took us to eating ice cream at a location named Dairy King, not to be confused with his wife Dairy Queen.

And mostly importantly, these country roads led us into the homes and into the lives of the people of Phillippi, West Virginia.

And every night after traveling these country roads, we would eat, worship, laugh, play, and sleep at a place named **Camp Hope**.

So it must be a God thing, that in the midst of stolen, plundered, and colonized land, there was a place of hope.

Now, the exterior work was hard and gritty. The days were often hot and sometimes it rained which made working outside tricky. There were moments of joy and gladness, moments of frustration and sometimes anger.

The work ranged from replacing a floor in the bathroom and under the sink and toilet, and also replacing two windows.

Removing the kitchen floor and putting down a new floor with insulation and installing 2x4 stud walls.

And finally patching a metal roof, cleaning and clearing out gutters and rebuilding a deck.

But the interior work, the work which God did inside of us 32 Scappers, was more beautiful than any remodeling we did.

And the interior work is the mystery, *or better yet*, the mercy of the seed sowed in the Good Soil.

This Sunday begins a three-week period of Jesus preaching on parables.

Today we receive a gift because rarely does Jesus explain the parable he taught.

And it's a curious thing because have you ever realized; scripture never accounts for any of the disciples having being gardeners? The lectionary this morning omits it, but right before Jesus explains the parable, they ask, "Why do you speak in parables?"

The disciples were fisherman, tax collectors, one was a zealot, and one was a treasurer.

Let's give the disciples grace because they actually just did not know how this worked.

For us gathered today, Jesus walks through the parable and Matthew's Gospel, make it clear for us:

This is not a secret, this is not the Messianic secret, this is not a secret Scapper gift.

God has revealed Himself to us born through the seed of a woman by the power of the Holy Spirit. From creation through resurrection, God is the gardener.

God is the Sower. His good news is the seed. And we are the soil.

How we hear and understand His teachings tell us what kind of soil we are.

And if we are the Good Soil, St Columba's Appalachia Project cannot be connected to land.

Because you can't put roots down on stolen land.

SCAP is a seed that God places in the soil of our hearts and in the act of saying yes, we produce fruit.

And the fruit produced this summer during SCAP were testimonies of bravery and courage, the ability to be vulnerable in front of their peers and that be held with gentleness, and the choice, every day, to wake up and to be kind to one another in a world that struggles to be kind.

The fruit these kid produce is worth listening to.

When I was a hospital Chaplain, I often visited kids whose depression and anxiety was so heavy it led them to self-harming. And as they would talk, and I would listen, I found myself regularly asking them this question:

“What is the gift that God has given you that your parents don't see?”

Because I knew that whatever that gift was, was the glory of God.

I am not the Sower. My job as the Director of Youth Ministries is to bear witness to the stories of our kids.

And if we listen to their stories. If we listen to what it means to be a kid today and stop projecting our own upbringings onto them.

If we listen to what it means to be a Queer or Trans kid and commit to walking alongside them in ways that honor them.

If we listen...

Mitchell W. Felton
St. Columba's Episcopal Church
Washington, D.C.
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St. Columba's Appalachia Parable
Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23
Seventh Sunday after Pentecost, Year A

We might find our way out of our child hunger and homelessness.

We might find our way out of gun violence in our schools.

We might find our way out of Country Roads and find our back into a Kingdom of Love.

Jesus told us many things in parables.

“Let anyone with ears listen!”