

Balm for the Soul

When I'm not 'Pastoring', I'm living the life of a small farmer, which is a humble life. In years of drought, we exhaust our cisterns to water all our plants. In years of abundant rain we are often unable to bale hay to put up for the winter. And large gullies wash out planted crops and erode topsoil. Our living room ceiling has a leak where the roof meets the chimney, and the grass grows too tall to cut. In the harsh



winter, our milking machine freezes up, doors freeze shut, waterers freeze over, and chilling winds cut you to the bone. The stifling heat of August begins to wilt plants, and the flies are constantly chewing on the cows. Last month, someone stole 2 of our bee hives—who does that? There are calves born too late and die, others eat something harmful and die, they get pneumonia, pink eye and sometimes gash themselves on sharp objects. We buried 2 cows last summer and still don't know what caused their demise. Come to think of it, the life of a farmer is a hard life.

Yet, there are times when it is pure bliss. This past month, we witnessed our cow give birth to a healthy bull calf. The joy of watching the cow become a mother and lick that baby and help him rise to his feet within a couple of hours was immensely satisfying. Having an endless supply of fresh milk assures we will never go hungry and makes the best ice cream. Watching the bees do their pollinating and gather their honey and work together in a great orchestra of creation's majesty is a balm for the soul. Attending to the chickens scratching and pecking and preening and all the wonderful things they do is better than reality TV. The wonder of planting seeds and watching them become fruit-producing plants is too much for my mind to comprehend. The life of a farmer is a sweet life, and I wouldn't trade it for anything.

I recently built my grandson Kaisyn a tree house where he can go and wonder and play and be free. He is now big enough to drive a go cart and he loves to be speed racer! I often push my granddaughter on her horse swing in our backyard and she always wants to go higher and have me try to get her. We jump on the trampoline and she shows me all her tricks of somersaults and falling backwards. Kaisyn loves to ride on my John Deere mower and help me mow the grass, but especially use the blower machine to blow off all the clippings when we are done. They're my future farmers and often get my tools and try and fix things with them. They love to gather and count the chicken eggs and feed the rabbits. Life on the farm is especially wonderful when you have a 9 year old grandson and 3 year old granddaughter to share it with. And as their "Poppy" I've learned they need it as much as I need them.

At 59, I find myself getting tired more quickly than I used to, from fixing fence to building shelters, to working in the garden, to chasing cows. But it's a good tired. I'm reminded of what the Teacher said in Ecc. 5: 12: "The sleep of a laborer is sweet, whether he eats little or much." At Heavenly Acres we enjoy an abundance of fresh food, hard work, and family celebrations. Life is good, God is great, and I'm grateful to be living this life close to the land. I hope each of you have fond memories of a farm from your childhood that nurtured you and taught you the blessings of God's creation alive and the benefits of hard work and living close to the land. Such is great medicine during a pandemic. I live close to the abundant grace of the Creator as beautifully described by Wendell Berry:

*When despair for the world grows in me
and I wake in the night at the least sound
in fear of what my life and my children's lives may be,
I go and lie down where the wood drake
rests in his beauty on the water, and the great heron feeds.
I come into the peace of wild things
who do not tax their lives with forethought
of grief. I come into the presence of still water.
And I feel above me the day-blind stars
waiting with their light. For a time
I rest in the grace of the world, and am free.*

Regional Minister Ron Routledge

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