

Dewberry Jesus

If you live out of town or drive by a roadside ditch or walk under the flight path of berry eating birds, you may have seen these beautiful white flowers all around. They're growing in tangled up vines that make them easy to want to avoid like a stranger on the street. If you found yourself caught up in (or unaware of) their presence, they will rake your skin, leaving a perforated scab. And if you don't know what they could produce, you might be inclined to tear them out of the ground or mow over them like I've done before.

The vines themselves aren't beautiful or comfortable to be around. They force you to pay attention to where you are going and how you are going to get there and they are sharp around the edges - kind of like Jesus - but inside them is beauty and nourishment and new life just waiting to be released.

A few weeks ago that new life started to emerge. The flowers appeared. The vines were still thorny, but, instead of a threat to your shins, they became a source of anticipation, for soon those flowers will become deliciously tart dewberries ready to be picked and eaten off the vine or baked into a cobbler or otherwise enjoyed around a table with friends.

But before the dewberries arrive to join us at the table, before their fruit is available, their flowers must fade, transforming into first a green bud and then a red fruit and getting darker and darker until they become so dark that it would be easy to assume, once again like Jesus, that they were gone. Unless you knew where to look.

And once you notice them out on a walk or someone points them out to you, you'll see them again and again. Once you've seen them it's easier to spot them. Once you've sat around a table with a cobbler full of them and enough forks to go around, and you taste how perfect they are, you'll want to sit around that table all the time.

And, maybe, you'll stand in awe of the fact that through no effort of your own - no water, no fertilizer, no need of you to do anything at all - they showed up to nourish you if you'll let them keep growing around you, kind of like Jesus.

I'm not here to tell you that Jesus is a dewberry or that dewberries are the presence of the resurrected Christ among us, but I am saying once you've discovered them in your midst you won't pay attention to the land around you the same. You'll see the hillsides and ditches in a new ways, much like these two friends came to see Jesus on the road to Emmaus.

As they were walking not knowing what to look for and only seeing the despair of fruitless hope all around them. They felt no hope or anticipation. Only sadness. The one who was supposed to bring new life, new hope, living water, whatever you want to call it was dead.

And what's worse? They didn't know where his body was. They couldn't believe what others were saying about him and the resurrection.

Dewberry Jesus

But along their walk they picked up this stranger who showed them what to look for, who told them about what they had missed before, who sat around a table and ate with them, and who opened their eyes to what had been right in front of them all along: their risen savior!

They almost missed it because they didn't know what they should be looking for. They'd heard it said they he was raised up, but all they could see was his absence. They didn't expect that in the midst of the thorns and briars of their despair, the hope of new life might appear.

But like a dewberry, Jesus was there. Even when it looked like or felt like he was gone, he wasn't. He's was with them. They just had to learn to see him, to see what he made possible, to see how he transformed through new eyes, a different perspective.

But how do we get new eyes? A different perspective? I think their walk shows us how.

In the midst of their sadness, they welcome a stranger.

They bring the stranger into their journey. They want him to know what they know.

They keep moving and they're open to what the stranger might have to say to them.

They break bread together.

Welcome and Connection, Openness and Fellowship. That's how they come to see through new eyes. That's how they come to Jesus again. That's how their hope returns. That's how it returns to us as well.

We're all going somewhere. And wherever we are going we are carrying all kinds of baggage with us - fear, failure, grief, loneliness, regret, doubt - all the same things those two friends on their way to Emmaus were carrying. And all that baggage clouds our view not only of what's possible, but of what is right in front of us. Of what God is doing in and around us right now.

This story reminds us that Jesus is walking with us, in the midst of it all, nudging us to look at the world differently. To look past the thorns and the faded flowers to see the bounty that's out there to feed us. To stop believing that the way things were are the way they have to be. To consider the possibility that what we couldn't believe (or didn't have the courage to believe) could happen, can happen. IS HAPPENING.

If we, like the men walking to Emmaus, can, in the midst of all that weighs us down, find ways to welcome strangers into our midst, connect our journey with theirs, keep moving forward and listen to what they have to say - if we can take time to share a meal with them and with others - there is no telling who we might find them to be and how they might open up a new way of looking at the world for us, and there is no doubt that the hope we lost, the the grief we've endured can be transformed into a new and brighter and better joy than ever before.

May it be so. Amen.