



## Dust

February 26, 2020

Rachel Yates

I killed it. At least I think I killed it. I haven't seen any movement, any sign of life. I'm not sure how long I should wait to know for certain, but I'm pretty sure I killed it.

When I received my tiny pot of soil and a carnation seed at the Presbytery Gathering, I thought, "How hard can it be? People grow flowers all the time." Others who had joined me at the Rock Prairie chancel to be commissioned or installed and who had also received their tiny pots expressed more trepidation. We held in our hands the prospect of new life, if only we could tend to it properly. It symbolized the ministries with which we'd been entrusted and our call to nurture and care for them.

And it even came with instructions! We each received a card telling us how to care for this wee seed. Keep it moist and in a dark, warm place. That seemed easy enough, except I placed the pot somewhere I immediately forgot about it – in the dark space between the microwave and the oven. Two days later when I checked on it, the soil was bone dry. Committing to do better, I watered the seed and tucked it into that dark space again...with the same outcome. Bringing it to the light didn't help by that point. Now when I water it, if I water it, I'm thinking, "What's the point?"

I hope you won't take my failure as a gardener as a sign that I'm also doomed as one of your leaders. Let's trust the metaphor only carries so far.

On this Ash Wednesday, the start of our Lenten season, it seems a fitting time to recognize death and all the errors that lead to it: unjustified confidence, bouts of nurture coupled with neglect, hopelessness. Whether it's the seed in a tiny terra cotta pot or my spiritual life, I move in fits and starts. Were salvation left up to me, I would surely kill it.

That's the point, yes? The road to Jerusalem is not just a hard one that Jesus took toward his trial, torture, and death. It's also the one we would have taken had he not -- the one we deserved. On our forty-day journey, we remember, reflect, and recommit.

I thought I should toss the soil and seed into the trash to rid myself of my failed attempt at gardening. Now I think it will stay in a prominent place as a Lenten reminder of God's words to Adam: "By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread, till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; for you are dust, and to dust you shall return." (Genesis 3:19). My pot will stay in a prominent place as a Lenten reminder of both my emptiness and the fullness of God's love, mercy, and grace.

