

BREATHE

A spiritual care resource created by Kaseman's Spiritual Care Department

Parallel Story

A person put the tiny mustard seed in the ground, and it began to grow. The shrub grew up so big it was like a little tree, and the birds of the air came and they made their nests there. (Mark 4:31-32; Luke 13:19)

The Reluctant Oak Tree

(Adapted from "Fear to Serenity with Anthony de Mello" by Thomas G. Casey SJ and Margaret Brennan Hasset, Paulist Press 2011, Pages 70-72)

Once upon a time, there was a giant oak tree in a city park. Birds and squirrels nested high up in the tree. One morning, a small acorn fell from the tree onto the grassy ground below.

The acorn was happy with life on the lush grass and wanted things to remain just as they were. The last thing it wanted—God forbid!—was to become an oak tree. It had heard frightening stories about oak trees being cut down by human beings or struck by bolts of lightning. The little acorn settled comfortably on the grass, but slowly sank into the soil beneath. Eventually, the sun and the rain transformed the acorn into a small green shoot. It was not happy with its new transformed self. It had changed into something new against its will.

"Well," the shoot said, "I'm not growing any taller than this."

However, one day the park gardener came across the fragile green sprout and took a liking to it and started to nurture it. Each day he came by, cleared away weeds so the sun could shine directly on it. Before it knew what was happening, the shoot became a sapling. Again, the growing plant, now a sapling, was devastated. Not only was life as an acorn gone, but now it seemed that life as a shoot was gone forever as well. It decided that enough was enough: it would not grow any leaves. But the park gardener continued to care for this young tree. He fastened it against a stake to help it withstand strong winds, and regularly pruned its branches.

In early spring, the first buds appeared, and then the first leaves. The leaves were large and green. The young oak tree decided that it did not want any more change. With all its might, it forbade each leaf from changing color in the fall. But the gardener continued to watch over the tree. He watered its roots and fertilized the ground beneath it. Small groups of people began to gather in the park to look at what had now become a giant tree. During the fall, they were amazed by the leaves that blazed red. The huge oak tree became a generous protection and shade for humans, animals, and birds. The tree's dense crown provided a cool umbrella against the sun's glare in summer. Yet the oak tree had still not come to terms with itself as a tree that provided shelter for other creatures.

But something happened one winter night: an icy windstorm damaged the oak tree. The next morning, the gardener came by to check on the oak tree and saw that many of its branches were broken. He carefully cut them away and applied soothing ointment to the tree. He encircled the trunk with heavy wooden planks and a wire mesh.

After working a long time on his knees at the base of the tree, the gardener paused. For a moment he turned his face upward. The giant oak tree looked down at his gardener's kind face, which radiated wisdom and acceptance. With that loving and kind gaze, something changed within the oak tree. The tree realized that living is not about passively resigning to its fate or merely tolerating the changes one goes through. Now, the tree recognized its life as a blessing. Its leaves rustled in the wind and even its majestic trunk swayed slightly as it breathed in a newfound sense of deep peace, full acceptance, and surrender.



REFLECTION

Reflect on the wondering questions below with a friend or colleague by taking turns in answering each question.

WONDERING QUESTIONS with a conversation partner:

- Which part of the story did you find most important? What resonated with you?
- Which part of the story is about you? Where are you in the story?
- Notice moments in your journey when you resisted change. Moments when you accepted change.
- Who might the gardener be in your life? OR In what ways have you been a gardener in your life?

Remember, keep on sharing your stories. Keep on listening to each other's stories.

My Tree of Life

Write your answers in the box. You are invited to color the tree & connect your answers to the tree.

<p>SUNLIGHT, WATER, DIRT: What serves as your <u>nourishment</u> to your body, mind & spirit?</p>
<p>LEAVES & BRANCHES: What actions do you need to embody that make you <u>grow</u>, <u>thrive</u>, <u>expand</u>, <u>reach new heights</u>?</p>
<p>PRUNING: What do you need to <u>cut off</u>? Who and/or what do you need to let go in your life so you can thrive?</p>
<p>TRUNK: Who and/or what makes you <u>strong</u>, <u>stable</u>, <u>resilient</u>?</p>
<p>ROOTS: Who and/or what is your <u>main support</u> during difficult or challenging times – say, when life's ground is <u>shaky</u>?</p>



<p>SEED OR FRUIT: What seeds you want to plant in your life, or fruits you want to harvest in the future? What are your <u>hopes</u> & <u>dreams</u> for the future?</p>
<p>GOOD BUGS & PLANTS TO INTEGRATE IN YOUR ENVIRONMENT: What life-giving symbiotic relationship with others help you grow/thrive?</p>
<p>BAD BUGS & PLANTS IN YOUR ENVIRONMENT: What things - actions or people - in your life will potentially overtake or overwhelm you and put you in <u>danger</u>?</p>