

Instructions from the Ancients

When fertile land was considered to be the property and responsibility of the community....

In our world of “big” how can there be any place for “small”?

Look at the size of new homes and the way small companies long to expand. For many there is no such thing as enough.

But the Old Testament Wisdom Writers advise otherwise. Thousands of years ago this Middle Eastern area was the cradle from which our cereals and legumes originated. They realized fertile soil could not be handled as private property – it was to be handed from one generation to another.

Modern day essayist Wendell Barry tells us the claims upon us of family, community, land and human decency must be treated as ordinary and essential manifestations of God’s claim on human life.

The command to “have dominion” over the earth didn’t mean to conquer it. This was told to those who understood they were “created in God’s image”. They had an intimate affinity with the Creator. “The fear (respect) of Yahweh is the beginning of wisdom. It is not our prerogative to think we can bend nature around our demands so we can run the world.”

When fleeing through the Sinai Desert, the people were given food – but were instructed to collect only as much of the manna as they could use in a day. Have faith. God would also relieve their hunger on the morrow.

As they entered the land reputed to be “flowing with milk and honey”, the ancients cautioned that this land was fragile and precious. There was no margin for negligence.

How does today’s visionary, who believes in modesty and sustainability, survive in our world of big? Organic farmers are partnering with city clients. Farm families are focusing on intensity. Urban gardens have become vogue.

Small is not just a fantasy. It has its unique way of gaining attention. You’ll know that if you’ve ever found yourself in bed with a mosquito!

(written by Joyce Sasse, 2010)