

At one end of the garden stood a trellis supporting tomato plants. It was painted green, and placed in just the right position to provide shelter from strong sunlight and wind. The tomatoes were ripe and plump, and the four gardeners who tended that little patch were proud of their handiwork.

One day a young man approached them and said, "You've done a really good job here. May I spend some time working with you on your little patch?"

One of the four said, "What do you mean, 'work on our little patch'? We've seen how you work- out there, among all those other vegetables. You hardly ever deign to grace us with your presence. You just swan back here from time to time and expect us to greet you with open arms! No! Our vegetables are select, and grow up the trellis that we've always had since.....well.....since Moses. We work hard to keep it in good condition, repairing and painting it every season, making sure the tomatoes have a good, sturdy framework to live by."

"Oh." said the young man. "Have you ever thought of growing something else, like beans, for instance?"

"Scrawny beans?! Those outsiders? Pahl! No way! It's tomatoes or nothing. You, on the other hand, mess about with all sorts of vegetables. You don't even bother to stick to climbers."

"What can I say." said the young man. "I like to get my hands dirty."

The four wrinkled their noses. Getting their hands dirty was not on their agenda, and they avoided it as much as they

could. Planting tomato seedlings was as far as they would go in that area, because that didn't take a lot of digging.

"What we want to know," said one of them, "is who gave you permission to be here in the first place? Our credentials come from the Master Gardener. In fact it was he who gave us this trellis. Who told *you* you could muck about out there with that lot?" His sweeping gesture took in the rest of the garden, which was full of all kinds of vegetables - potatoes, broccoli, cabbages, just to mention a few - all thriving in the soil adjoining their precious patch. It was obvious to them that it didn't conform to the rules of the Master Gardener. Firstly it wasn't planted in nice neat rows, and secondly the vegetables all seemed to be mixed in with each other. But if the *real* truth be known, they were jealous, because those veggies, the ones outside their control, seemed even more healthy than their tomato plants.

The young man thought for a time, then said, "Let me ask you a question. My cousin John worked in this garden a while ago. That's his trellis over there." He pointed to the far side of the garden. This trellis was unpainted bare wood, but supporting a variety of climbing plants - beans, peas; even a passionfruit vine at one end. "Who do you think gave *him* permission to tend this garden?"

The four looked at each other, then huddled together to discuss their reply. They were in a bind.

"Ifwe say, 'The Master Gardener', he'll say, 'Then why don't you admire John's handiwork?' But ifwe say, 'He came

with no authority,' then how do we explain all these veggies that threaten to overtake our patch? We'll have to play it safe."

They turned to the young man and said, "We don't really know the answer to that question."

He smiled, and with a mischievous wink said, "Then I won't tell you who gave me permission to be here."

He went to walk away, but then turned back.

"You know, between us we could have cooked up a delicious vegetable soup, or stir fry, or ratatouille....." He sighed. ".....Such a pity."

And then he walked out into his beloved garden, back to his veggies.

IN THE GARDEN

(Matthew 2(:23-32)



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