

7<sup>th</sup> May 2024

## Earth

**"We are of the soil and the soil is of us."**

Luther Standing Bear, *Land of the Spotted Eagle* (1933)

People sometimes ask me where my ideas come from for these "Thought for the Day" pieces. Well, inspiration (if that's what it is) comes to me in a variety of ways. But I didn't expect to be inspired by dirty carrots!

We have a weekly "veggie box" delivered from a local market-garden: fresh eggs, a variety of fruit, and vegetables "in season". It's interesting to discover what "in season" means – chard one week, beetroot another, fennel occasionally, as well as the weekly staples of onions, potatoes and carrots. As I was unpacking this week's box, the carrots – big, misshapen, organic carrots, that taste like carrots used to taste – were very dirty, obviously lifted that morning from wet soil. I scrubbed them down, filling a basin with muddy water. Then I looked at my hands. They were filthy, as if I'd done a morning's weeding. They needed scrubbing too.

My carrots came from the earth of a market garden and carried earth into my home and onto my hands. That earth reminded me that "we are soil and the soil is of us." And one day, when death comes, I shall return to the earth, and go back to whence I came. And that, from dirty carrots?

But maybe it's because I'd conducted a funeral service a few days before, in which I'd been asked to use the traditional words for the "committal" of the body – "earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust". These words come from the *Book of Common Prayer* from 1549 (around the time the King James version of the Bible appeared) and have, in many Christian traditions, been used ever since. Why? Because what they offer us is the truth. When we die, we return to the earth – both in burial and in cremation. Life is finite. The earth will claim us, just as the earth gave us life. Luther Standing Bear is right. "We are of the soil and the soil is of us."

So, as I scrubbed my hands and removed the earth which the dirty carrots had brought with them, and as I recalled a loved and cherished lady whom a family had recently laid to rest, I pondered the finite nature of my own life. Might we all benefit from giving that some thought, just as Luther Standing Bear voiced for his people their connection to the earth on which they lived, recognising the fragility of all of life?

### A prayer for today

*Lord, you gave us the earth, and all that it contains – my life included. Thank you. Amen*

*An original reflection © Tom Gordon*

*Also available at <https://swallowsnestnet.wordpress.com>*