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Dirt

"To a farmer, dirt is not waste, it is wealth."

Amit Kalantri, *Wealth of Words*

I love people who are enthusiastic and knowledgeable about their subject, whatever that might be. Hobby or work, amateur or professional, child or adult, if enthusiasm is conveyed, I'm easily hooked. Nuclear physics, brain surgery, violin making, metal detecting, stamp-collecting, astronomy, the life cycle of the blue whale – and I have no knowledge of any of these – come alive when someone is enthusiastically sharing their knowledge with me. That's why I love TV programmes such as *The Great British Sewing Bee, The Repair Shop, The Great Pottery Throwdown* and *The Sky at Night,* to name but a few. But I didn't expect to be drawn into an interest in dirt!

It was in a random "country-life" programme, in an interview with a microbiologist who was explaining how a handful of soil is teeming with life. He showed some of it under a microscope, and, sure enough, what looked like a lifeless handful of … well … dirt, suddenly became a fascinating world full of … well … life. It was his enthusiasm that got me. He was *passionate* about dirt. I could have listened to him for hours. And the most important thing he said was this: "I don't like it being called 'dirt', because that implies it's just worthless. And, believe me, it isn't!"

In a similar vein, E L Konigsburg wrote in *The View from Saturday,*

The way I see it, the difference between farmers and suburbanites is the difference in the way we feel about dirt. To them, the earth is something to be respected and preserved, but dirt gets no respect. A farmer likes dirt. Suburbanites like to get rid of it. Dirt is the working layer of earth. Dealing with dirt is as much a part of farm life as dealing with manure. Neither is user-friendly but both are necessary.

If there are differences in the ways we feel about dirt, what about people? Is *anyone* worth the label of "dirt", to be considered worthless, undeserving of any respect? For everyone's benefit, might we become farmers rather than suburbanites in our dealings with them? Might we become enthusiastic about those whom others might wish to get rid of?

"To a farmer, dirt is not waste, it is wealth," in the words of the Indian author, Amit Kalantri, quoted above. Could those we might treat as dirt be looked on as being *our* wealth rather than our waste?

A prayer for today

Everyone … made in the image of God? Might that be a better label for folk?

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