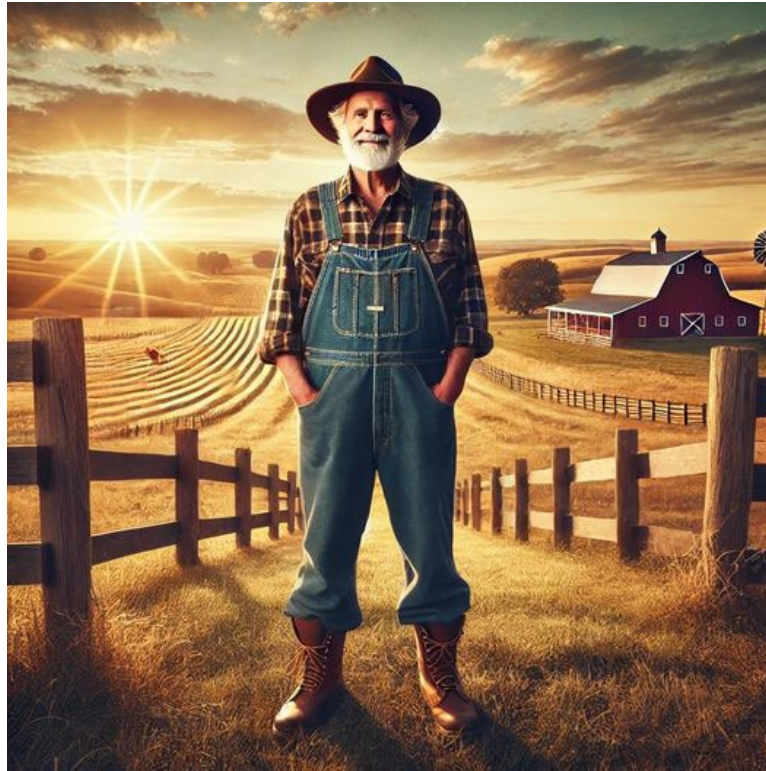


And on the Eighth Day, God Made a Neighbor



And on the eighth day, God looked down on his planned paradise and said, "*I need a caretaker.*" So God made a farmer.

But then, God leaned back, took a long look at the beautiful land, and realized something else: "*I need someone who understands that no matter how many acres I give him, he'll always live next to someone else.*" And so, God made a neighbor.

God knew this neighbor would need a big heart, enough to embrace his rights but also understand his limits. He'd need to value his land, yes, but also respect the line where his ends and another begins. This neighbor would need a strong sense of independence but an even stronger sense of responsibility—to his community, his children, and to the future of the soil he called his own. Because God knew that freedom, unchecked, can be a little like planting without boundaries—wild and likely to choke out the good around it. And so, God made a boundary.

"This land is my land." Yes, he'd sing it loud and proud, as loud as any rooster at dawn. But God knew that even the most faithful rooster doesn't crow in isolation. And so, He built into this neighbor an understanding—an understanding that his crowing reaches far and wide, and that every action has a ripple. For even the gentlest wind will carry the seeds of his choices into the fields of those he calls his neighbors.

And when the farmer read the laws and the permits, the fine print, and the boundaries laid before him, he might've grumbled a little. But God knew he'd come to realize the truth that even Thomas Jefferson, that founding farmer himself, once saw: *"Property rights are not absolute."* For a land that feeds one man alone is poor land, indeed. And a man who thinks he can fish all the fish from the pond is only casting his line into an empty future.

Because God knew that real property rights—the kind that matter, the kind that keep a farm flourishing for generations—come with respect for the land *and* the people on it. And God made it clear that rights come with boundaries and that good fences, well, they make good neighbors. Because without boundaries, what one-man claims can easily become what another loses.

So, God made balance. He made the neighbor who knows that his fertilizer might feed his own field but may flow into the stream that waters his neighbor's cattle. He made the farmer who may have the right to spray his crop but has the foresight to look at the wind and wonder what tomorrow's rain might bring to his neighbor's heirloom tomatoes. And God knew that with balance comes patience, for we're not here for just a season but for the seasons to come.

And God smiled, knowing he'd made someone who could pull on his boots in the morning with pride in his land but who'd look across the field at his neighbors with respect and understanding. And just as he made that rooster to crow, he made a farmer to stand up for what's his. But he also made him wise enough to know that what's his is rarely his alone.

And on that eighth day, God gave him a choice: *Live like an island or live like a neighbor.* Because it's only when we plant the seeds of respect that we see a harvest of peace.

And God said, *"So be it."* And so, God made a neighbor.