

THE TALE OF TWO GARDENS

Scripture Lesson: Genesis 2:8-14

Text: Mark 14:32

Songs: R560; F31; PH421 1,3,5; R383; R206

Dear Friends in Christ Jesus Our Lord,

How was your garden this summer? Did it produce well? Did you enjoy the hours you spent in it? Was it one of the delights of the summer season? In a sense, a farmer is one who has a very big garden. Here in the fertile heartland of America both personal gardens and professional gardens--farms!--are big business. We love our gardens and farms, and they are a highlight of our year.

When one goes back in antiquity one of the striking features of the Biblical account is that it begins in a garden, the Garden of Eden. What a garden it was! It was blend of a family garden, a decorative garden, and a farm. Since it was a garden God had made for people, the pinnacle of His creation, it was a perfect place for leisure gardening and serious gardening. In perfection, both were the same for Adam and Eve.

Since I graduated from seminary, they have discovered some special things about the Garden of Eden. I was surprised to read about the new archeological findings and the conclusions that have been drawn based on those findings. For example, our Scripture Lesson this morning told us that the Garden of Eden was watered by four rivers: Pishon, Gihon, Tigris, and Euphrates. The last two rivers we all learn about in elementary geography. What about the first two rivers? Did you ever hear of the Pishon and Gihon? Now notice how the second paragraph describing the Garden of Eden begins in verse 10, "A river watering the garden flowed from Eden." Old Testament scholars now say that Pishon and Gihon likely were irrigation canals that God created into the garden so there would be a perfect flow of water. They base that on the location and the language. If the Garden of Eden was really located in what today is the country of Iraq, and since the language of that day used the same word for "river" and "irrigation canal," Bible translators often did not make the distinction between the rivers God created and the canals He made to make this garden perfect. God's perfectly created irrigation system is one the Sumerians imitated, and still is used in many areas of the world today.

Of course, what we remember about the Garden of Eden is not so much the rivers that flowed through it or the way it was irrigated, but we remember the special trees that were there. The Garden of Eden was filled with fruit trees. The Garden of Eden had decorative trees. The Garden of Eden had impressive trees. Verse 9 has a summary statement about the trees of the Garden of Eden, "The Lord God made all kinds of trees grow out of the ground--trees that were pleasing to the eye and good for food."

Yet two trees are highlighted in the narrative. We read about them both in the second half of verse 9, "In the middle of the garden were the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil." They are singled out as especially significant.

Notice the order the Bible speaks of them. First, there was the "Tree of Life." This tree comes back in the last chapter of the Bible in Revelation 22:2, "On each side of the river stood the tree of life." That species of tree will be a mainstay of the vegetation in the heavenly city. In same chapter, Revelation 22, the last chapter of the Bible, we have the last Beatitude of the Bible in verse 14, "Blessed are those who wash their robes, that they may have the right to the tree of life and may go through the gates of the city." Again we meet the "Tree of Life."

The other tree is the “Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil.” Now Adam and Eve knew something of good and evil. Their task was to care for the Garden of Eden. We read in Genesis 2:15, “The Lord God took the man

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and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and to take care of it.” Obviously Adam and Eve knew some things were right to do and some things were wrong to do. They used their gardening skills to tend the garden God had made for them so they had a knowledge of right and wrong. Dr. Gerhart Aalders, the leading Reformed Old Testament scholar in the last century, makes a great deal of the choices Adam and Eve had to make daily in their work, choices of good and bad, of good, better, and best. Eating the God-forbidden fruit of the tree at the center of the Garden, the tree of “The Knowledge of Good and Evil,” was just going to make those choices more complex and difficult. That is exactly what happened. Adam and Eve could never have imagined how severe their choices would be after sin came into the world through them and because of them. Eating of that forbidden fruit radically altered their relationship with God and with each other, and changed the entire course of the planet Earth.

What we see is that these trees watered by God’s elaborate systems of rivers and irrigation canals were both trees of great significance. These two trees of Genesis 2:9 in the Garden of Eden are crucial both to history on planet earth and for life in the eternal kingdom.

What we all remember about the Garden of Eden is not so much its perfection, not so much the wonderful way it was watered so that tress could grow, but the tragic event that took place there. Eve and Adam sinned. Satan successfully tempted them. The world has never been the same. And that is what will always be remembered about the Garden of Eden. People pass over its perfection, people pass by the perfect system of irrigation that God had devised, people pass over the time that Adam and Eve spent in perfection walking and talking with God in the cool of the day, and instead people all over the world think first of sin when they think of the Garden of Eden.

But this is a message about “The Tale of Two Gardens.” In every way the second “garden” is in stark contrast to the Garden of Eden.

We call the second “garden” the “Garden of Gethsemane.” Did you know the Bible never calls it that? The Gospel writers refer to it as an olive grove or olive orchard. The word “Gethsemane” means “olive press.” It was primarily a place of olive trees. Apparently near where the press was, the owner had made a warm, friendly, cozy place for people to gather. Today some orchards near the major cities will have a small section where the tourists can stop and enjoy themselves. In Washington State and Michigan many of the orchards have a place where a person can sit at a picnic table and enjoy the aroma and atmosphere of fresh apples, or whatever fruit that orchard happens to be. The farmer gives it ambiance to attract the tourist. It appears that this enterprising olive farmer had the same idea. He had made a cozy spot where people could come. It was not a real “garden,” but it gave people the same sense of freedom and relaxation as a garden. The King James version of the Bible in John 18:1 does use the word “garden” for the place where Jesus and the disciples went on the last night of Jesus life here on earth. The NIV does not use the word “garden.” It merely says, “When he had finished praying, Jesus left with his disciples and crossed the Kidron Valley. On the other side there was an olive grove, and he and his disciples went into it. We are still so steeped in the King James that we speak of the “Garden of Gethsemane,” though our text is really right, “They went to a place called Gethsamane, and Jesus said to his disciples, ‘Sit here while I pray.’” In contrast to the carefully planned and structured Garden of Eden, Gethsemane barely passes for a garden.

The Garden of Eden had rich variety of trees. There the chorus of trees gave praise to the Creator. We noted their array and function, all for the glory of God and the enrichment of God’s image-bearers. In Gethsemane there was one variety of tree, just one, the olive tree. Those of you who have seen pictures of olive trees know

they are not much by tree standards. They are no oak, no evergreen, no maple or birch. They are just scrubby and sort of ugly. Nobody plants olive trees for decoration. They are just utilitarian--to grow olives. Again we note the contrast in "The Tale of Two Gardens."

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Yet in no dimension is the contrast greater than in what went on in the two gardens. Adam and Eve decided to do things their own way. They listened to Satan. They willfully disobeyed God. In contrast our text says, "They went to a place called Gethsemane, and Jesus said to his disciples, 'Sit here while I pray'." Even the boys and girls know what happened next. The teens could tell it well. Three times Jesus prayed, "Abba, Father, everything is possible for you. Take this cup from me. Yet not what I will but what you will." If only Eve and Adam had the wisdom and courage to pray that prayer when Satan tempted them in the Garden of Eden.

Jesus did it right. That is why we are right with God. In Jesus, through His obedience in the Garden of Gethsemane, we have our righteousness and our peace with God. Where Adam and Eve did it all wrong in the Garden of Eden, Jesus did it all right in the Garden of Gethsemane.

That is "The Tale of Two Gardens." In that "Tale of Two Gardens" we have everything we need to know about life here on earth and the life in heaven to come. The first garden explains the plight of the planet; the second explains the beauty of eternity.

When you eat the produce from your garden, when you live from the crops of your farm, remember that this world and the next is measured by two gardens. When you plant your garden next Spring or plant your crops next year, remember that all of life, time and eternity, can be explained by "The Tale of Two Gardens."

Come to think of it, the two gardens are an excellent explanation of Communion. Because of the first Garden Jesus had to come. Because of the second garden, we can now come to God. Each Lord's Supper the One who prayed in the second garden personally invites you to dine with Him. The disciples fell asleep. Do better. Belong to Jesus and enjoy His supper now and forever in heaven.

Let's sing together, "There is a Redeemer," Worship and Celebration Hymnal 206

Let's pray for an understanding of the gardens--and faith to claim the Christ of the Garden of Gethsemane.

