

May 18, 2023

## A SEASON OF GLORY, WONDER, AND PROMISE

With Mother's Day now in the rearview mirror, the gardening season is officially underway in my part of the world. Enthusiastic gardeners who have waited patiently (more or less) for the frost-safe date to pass now comb the local garden centers, searching out plants for their personal plots of paradise.

The joy of digging in the dirt and seeing it bring forth food and flowers is rooted in the life-giving instinct of the original gardener, God. "Now the Lord God had planted a garden in the east, in Eden; and there He put the man He had formed. And the Lord God made all kinds of trees grow out of the ground -- trees that were pleasing to the eye and good for food...The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it" (Genesis 2:8-9, 15).

But man's pride defiled his perfect relationship with God, and cost him life in that garden. The pleasant work of gardening changed when God cast him out, saying, "Cursed is the ground because of you; through painful toil you will eat of it all the days of your life. It will produce thorns and thistles for you...by the sweat of your brow you will eat your food" (Genesis 3:17-19). It is no wonder that farming and gardening, while rewarding, can also be laborious and frustrating!

Yet, the divine Gardener did not forsake his people, and He sowed his desire to redeem both them and the garden throughout the Bible. In the Old Testament, the Promised Land is foretold as "a land of hills and valleys, which drinks water by the rain from heaven, a land that the Lord your God cares for" (Deuteronomy 11:11-12).

In Isaiah 51:3 we read, "The Lord will surely comfort Zion and will look with compassion on all her ruins; he will make her deserts like Eden,

her wastelands like the garden of the Lord." The prophet Ezekiel foretold that God's people would one day hear passers-by say, "This land that was desolate has become like the garden of Eden" (Ezekiel 36:35).

In the New Testament, we see the embodied first fruit of God's redemptive garden: Jesus Christ. Jesus used many natural illustrations in his teaching, such as weeds invading wheat, the tiny but potent mustard seed, a priceless treasure found in a field, and a great harvest of souls (Matthew 24, 13, 9).

At the Last Supper, He used the image of a vine to explain our need to abide in God in order to bear fruit for his kingdom: "I am the vine, and my Father is the gardener. He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful" (John 15:1-8).

We see the life-giving heart of God in Jesus, as He prayed fervently in an olive grove the night before his death (Matthew 26:36ff). Once crucified, He was laid in a garden tomb (John 20:41). When He rose again and greeted Mary Magdalene, she thought He was the gardener (John 20:15). In a way, she was not mistaken.

Jesus is indeed the divine Gardener who has redeemed his people as promised, and who will ultimately welcome his followers to a place even more glorious than the Garden of Eden, where the tree of life yields its fruit every month and its leaves "are for the healing of the nations" (Revelation 22:2).

Even now, He graces gardens everywhere, bringing glory right out of the ground. May every sprout, leaf, and blossom He produces remind us of his love: "I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly" (John 10:10).

With love in the Lord,  
The Rev. Christine Maddux