

The Garden of Peace Text: John 19:38-42

During our Wednesday mid-week Lenten services, we've been following the **progress of the Gospel**: where it **originated**, how it **spreads**, and its **objective**. Last week we heard the Gospel itself, which focuses us on the sufferings and death of our Savior Jesus Christ. Tonight we consider the **outcome** of the gospel. We might call it the GARDEN OF PEACE.

Gardens tend to evoke pleasant thoughts for us. We associate parks, large estates, arboretums, nurseries, and even simple flower beds with beauty, relaxation, serenity, and peace.

If you would consider what happened in the very first garden, the **Garden of Eden**, you would think that gardens would be abhorred by us as **hideous symbols** of violence, suffering, death, and pending doom. Adam and Eve had **fallen into sin** there, and since then all of us have been placed under God's **curse of damnation**.

The horrors that sprouted in that garden reached full culmination on the cross. Not just a man, but the very **Son of God** was placed under the curse of damnation. The **powers of hell** grinned, and **demons** danced with delight. Nailed to a tree, a cross, Jesus hung fully exposed to God's burning, accusing anger. All love had deserted him. He groaned under his heavenly Father's holy hatred toward all sin. So intensely was God's anger focused on the cross that the world went dark around it, in fact, there were three hours of darkness, from noon to 3 PM. So heavy was God's justice on him that the earth beneath him buckled. For though Jesus was **totally innocent**, the **full responsibility for all people's sins** weighed heavily on him until, finally, it ripped his soul and body apart and he died. So appalled were his closest friends at what it all had come to that they had even **deserted him**, not knowing or even caring in what ditch his body might be flung by the Roman soldiers after the crucifixion.

But now we enter **another garden**, one near Golgotha, this one the result of what happened at Golgotha. It was a **garden estate** for the rich. There Jesus' limp, lifeless body would be placed. Now what a total contrast we have here to the violence of the cross! Joseph of Arimathea, who was not one of the Twelve but sort of an **unexpected friend**, goes personally to Governor Pontius Pilate to ask permission to retrieve the body. He is earnest with not the least hint of embarrassment or repugnancy. We read in John chapter 19,

Later, Joseph of Arimathea asked Pilate for the body of Jesus. Now Joseph was a disciple of Jesus, but secretly because he feared the Jews. With Pilate's permission, he came and took the body away. He was accompanied by Nicodemus, the man who earlier had visited Jesus at night. Nicodemus brought a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about seventy-five pounds. Taking Jesus' body, the two of them wrapped it, with the spices, in strips of linen. This was in accordance with Jewish burial customs. At the place where Jesus was crucified, there was a garden, and in the garden a new tomb, in which no one had ever been laid. Because it was the Jewish day of Preparation and since the tomb was nearby, they laid Jesus there. (verses 38-42)

Seventy-five pounds of spices matched that of a **king's burial**! Gently, quietly, they removed Christ's body from the cross and lovingly wrapped it—almost as if they were now **treating** all those wounds, **soothing** those tortured limbs. Preserving that precious body was their aim. They rescued it from being tossed into a ditch for the mass burials of peasants and criminals. Instead, they gently laid his body in a newly carved, never-before-used tomb—the first and only occupant in this Garden of Peace.

From the moment Jesus said *"It is finished"* on the cross, there was **peace** between God and the human race. The punishment for all sin was over. We have nothing more to fear from God or from the devil. God is so friendly toward us now that just before Jesus breathed his last, he was able, with complete peace of mind, to commit his body and soul entirely to this God who had just been so harsh with him. We hear him speak from the Cross, *"Father, into your hands I commit my spirit."*

Walk through this garden and see the effects of Christ's death, how the **peace with God** that he earned is evident. Jesus' **body** was **treated** so **richly** and with such **dignity**. That demonstrates that the disgrace and horror of death is now gone. For us who trust in Jesus, death is no longer a punishment for sin. Our sins have been forgiven. It means now the entrance to eternal bliss is wide open to us.

The **pleasant way** in which Jesus' body was buried and its **pleasant location** show us that there is nothing for us to fear in death. As the Bible says, *"Precious in the sight of the LORD is the death of his saints"* (Ps 116:15). Jesus went ahead of us through the experience of death to render it powerless and harmless. It was no coincidence that Jesus' burial preparations were not completed on that day. He wouldn't need it. The fact is he would **live again**. Trusting Jesus, we too will live. He had announced on several occasions, *"On the third day I will rise again."* And His promises are always carried out to the letter.

In the spring, people plant gardens, looking forward to the new life that will spring up abundantly more marvelous than the original seed it came from. We look at this **Garden of Peace**, knowing that what was planted there will spring up on the third day and produce abundant life for all believers. For this reason and with this anticipation, it is okay to make our cemeteries look like beautiful, peaceful gardens, because our bodies are merely planted in the earth to rise again on the Last Day.

Thus we see that the **Garden of Eden** was **intended for eternal life**. But the **Garden of Peace produces eternal life**. From the Garden of **Eden** came the harvest of the **grim reaper**. From the Garden of **Peace** comes the harvest of **souls for salvation**. From the Garden of **Eden** sprouted **sin**, sadness, fear, and punishment. But from the Garden of **Peace** flourishes **righteousness, joy, freedom, and hope**.

Let us keep our eyes on that garden near Golgotha as we anticipate the life that blooms from it for us. For though our lives here on earth last only a season, there is for us in Christ an eternal springtime in heaven. Amen.