



The Three Gardens

Sermon - Steve Stanis

Easter Sunday 17/4/22

John 20:1-31 Revelation 21:1-7

"Little Loved Ones, Easter Defeated, All Things New"

What do gardens mean to you? Beauty... overwhelming... hard work... relaxation... manicured to perfection or natural?

In 'The Three Gardens' Herman Bavinck writes:

For the third time the Bible takes us along to a garden, this time to the garden of Joseph of Arimathea, the location of Jesus' tomb.

In the Garden of Eden, Adam dwelt in the first paradise, and he wanted to be equal to God; in the Garden of Gethsemane, God called to him, "Adam, where are you?"

While Genesis 1 and 2 tell us about the birth of creation, Matthew 28 indicates the start of the new creation, the beginning of the new heaven and the new earth, the morning of the new creation.

In the third garden we again are placed in paradise. This is where we will be forever with the Lord (Rev 21).

The Tomb Garden

The chapters in the Gospels that describe Jesus' suffering are closely connected to Genesis 3, a chapter that

anticipates Matthew 26 and 27. This garden is bearing the fruit of faith in this very moment in Christ's life, death and resurrection.

Jesus rose from the dead on a spring morning when, in the distance, the day was dawning; a faint glimmer of light tried to penetrate the tall trees, and on the horizon purple streaks signalled the arrival of a new day; birds twittered in the foliage, flowers began to unfold, and a general air of expectation spread throughout the garden.

This was the morning of creation, when God saw all that he had made.

This was also the end-time... the new world where justice dwelt in the garden of Joseph of Arimathea. Joseph's garden lay between the Garden of Eden and the New Jerusalem, bordering on both. Spanning all the centuries of world history, right here in the garden of Joseph, the first and the second paradise met each other. It was the birth of the new creation.

Jesus had foretold this moment to his disciples throughout his three years with them. **John 11:25-26:**

²⁵ Jesus said, "I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die; ²⁶ and whoever lives by believing in me will never die.

Yet the disciples were not awake to the very promise Jesus foretold and fulfilled.

The Gardener

The first person to encounter the risen Christ was Mary Magdalene. It happened in this garden.

"Woman, why are you crying? (V13)

"I don't know where they have put him." (V14)

Not recognising Jesus, Mary was "thinking he was the gardener." (V15)

Jesus said to her, "Mary". (V16)

At first Mary thought Jesus was the gardener... a logical mistake... a prophetic mistake... a beautiful mistake...

Or perhaps not a mistake at all.

Bavinck writes that if Mary was wrong about Jesus' identity as the gardener, she was wrong in the right way!

Jesus rose into a garden. A garden is a place to cultivate and grow living things. On Easter Sunday the garden brought forth the first fruits of resurrection — "Jesus Christ declared to be the Son of God by resurrection from the dead." (Romans 1:4)

The opened tomb revealed that Jesus was awake, the seed for the eternal promise God delivered.

The first seed raised by God in the garden of resurrection became the gardener. When Mary Magdalene "supposed him to be the gardener," she was exactly right! Jesus is now the gardener of the resurrection, cultivating new life in all who believe.

The first Adam was a gardener who failed in his task and the world turned from God. But the second Adam will succeed in his task — Christ will restore the ruined garden. With Christ as the gardener of new creation we have the promise of the new heaven and the new earth.

Now Mary responds to the resurrected Jesus, "teacher" (V16)

"I have seen the Lord!" (V18).

Here the Bible goes all out to tell us that we are standing on the threshold of a new world. It can and will never go back to what it once was!

Jesus said, "Do not hold on to me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father. Go instead to my brothers and tell them, 'I am ascending to my Father, and your Father, to my God, and your God.'" (V17)

Prediction of the third Garden

When, later, the book of Revelation describes for us in living colour how the New Jerusalem comes down out of heaven, and how there, in that holy city, the rivers of life flow and the Tree of Life grows, all of that is the result of what happens here. Here the rebirth of all things finds its start; here the new world has its beginning.

Revelation 21:5-6 reminds, reinforces and brings us the reassurance of an overflowing everlasting garden.

*He who was seated on the throne said,
"I am making everything new!"*

Then he said, "Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true."

He said to me: "It is done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End.

To the thirsty I will give water without cost from the spring of the water of life.

Significance for the Future

Tom Wright (an English New Testament Scholar) says:
Easter is about the wild delight of God's creative power; not very traditional, perhaps, but at least we ought to shout Alleluias instead of murmuring them.

Rejoicing in faith!

Every step back from that is a step towards an ethereal or esoteric Easter experience, and the thing about Easter is that it is neither ethereal or esoteric. It's about the real Jesus coming out of the real tomb and getting God's real new creation under way.

The implications of Jesus' resurrection provide for us four steps on our journey by faith in Jesus' ways, as the way of all.

We are called to be sent out (V19-21)

The disciples, after the resurrection, were hiding behind closed doors. They were afraid.

But Jesus seeks them out, not to chastise but to share his peace with them. The new creation is here. Jesus is victorious. Go out and share the peace of Jesus.

We must live each day, not closed off from people but sharing mercy, **connected** with others, just as Jesus shows mercy and is **connected** to his fearful friends.

We have received the power of the Holy Spirit (V22)

Can you imagine? Jesus breathed on them, and they received the Holy Spirit. This is so important. This happened before Pentecost.

This shows us that we can only be transformed to be like Jesus by the power of the Holy Spirit. These men, who were trained by Jesus to build his church, could only do so by the power of the Holy Spirit. We are the same. We must be earnestly **prayerful** that we are filled with the power of the Holy Spirit so that God's **transforming** work can happen in us, here in Kiama and beyond.

We must hold forth his forgiveness through faith for all (V23)

Jesus sends the disciples to continue his ministry and to preach the Gospel. Those that hear of Jesus through them, directly or indirectly, will have the opportunity to turn to God and receive his forgiveness. The disciples themselves have no power to forgive sins apart from that given them by the message of the death of Christ for their redemption.

We too must have an attitude of grace towards others as we live as Jesus' followers. This Easter, be reminded of God's grace and commit to extending it across all generations, as the **intergenerational** people of God.

We are sent out as his disciples in His presence (V24-29)

Jesus is alive! Poor Thomas! Think back to John 11 when Jesus told the disciples he was heading back to Judea to see Lazarus. The disciples fearfully reminded him that the Jews there had just tried to stone him. It's Thomas who bravely says, "Let's go also, that we may die with him."
(11:16)

We all have moments we're proud of and other moments we wish we could forget. What we learn from Thomas is that being in Jesus' presence brought out the best in him by increasing his faith. Conversely, being away from Jesus seemed to trigger doubt.

Jesus did not chastise him for his lack of faith. Instead, his encounter with Thomas allows him to believe. We go out filled by the power of the Holy Spirit; we go out in faith because Jesus is alive and His presence is with us.

Jesus is not dead. Turn to him and live.

Conclusion

As we are sent out by Jesus this Easter, I pray our encounters with others are filled with grace as we share our risen Lord.

Remember this is the mission God has set before us as we look forward...

"To glorify God, making Jesus known, as we love and serve together."

John 20:30-31 - Is there any clearer explanation of the Gospel of Jesus recorded anywhere? Read this with me now!

"Jesus performed many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. ³¹

But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name."

Has Jesus at Easter raised for you more questions than answers? Then come and join with me on Wednesday April 27th at either 2pm or 7:30pm for an hour to discuss an opportunity to investigate and explore who Jesus Christ truly is. A brilliant course called "Christianity Explored" can follow. Don't postpone the best decision you will ever make! Hallelujah!

