

Coach House Church BEACONS

THE BEST GARDEN

13TH JUNE 2020

I love spending time in my garden, maybe you also like spending time in your garden . One of the benefits of the recent lockdown has been that I have been able to spend more time in my garden, enjoying the surroundings, planting new flowers, and getting on with some of the bigger jobs that have needed doing. This has, of course, been made so much better by the unusually sunny weather that we have been blessed with. It is also the case that having access to a nice outdoor space has meant that, as the lockdown has eased, and, in accordance with government guidelines, we have been able to meet a couple of friends occasionally.

I know that I am not alone in feeling this way, it is almost universal for people to want to spend time in a garden. Gardens offer a place of tranquillity, a place to rest and reflect, a place to spend time with friends, and also a place to grow your own food.

We have a garden around the church which gives us extra space for events but is still a place of enjoyment when you want to just sit a think. It is looked after by some amazing gardeners who look after it so that others can benefit from the space.

So what is it about gardens that draw us in? Is there something deep within us that yearns for the joy of a well kept garden to relax in or to tend?

Well it goes back to the way we were created. The bible tells us that Adam, the first man, was created "in the image of God"

Now, before God created Adam, He made special preparation, He planted a garden, a special place where He could share fellowship with the man He had

created. This garden was planted with trees that gave fruit for Adam to eat, and there was river to water it. But more than that God himself liked to walk in the garden. He came to talk with Adam, and in time Eve as well. This place was special and perfect, there was no pain, no illness, no decay, no death. Adam and Eve could have lived there and enjoyed being in the presence of God for ever. We can see that God enjoyed being in the garden, so, as Adam was made in God's image, he also, must have enjoyed being in the garden that we now call the garden of Eden.

All of us are, of course, descended from Adam and, therefore, this love of gardens has been passed down from generation to generation, we have, amazingly, inherited Adam's God given love of gardens.

Of course we know that Adam's time in that garden came to an abrupt end when he sinned. From that point on mankind's relationship with God changed. We could not be with God in that special garden any longer, so God decided to put into action a plan to bring people back to a place where they could fellowship with Him for eternity as He had originally planned.

Despite the passage of time mankind has never lost that love of gardens. The bible refers to gardens from time to time confirming that this love is not something new but something that has always been there. Sometimes it is a garden as we might know it now, sometimes it is pictured as a vineyard. Remember the first thing Noah did when he got off the boat? He planted a vineyard. There are many reasons for this but one of them might be that he had heard of the original garden in Eden and wanted to create a new garden to symbolise the new start. We know though that this attempt went wrong and Noah got drunk which was because he was working in his own strength and not God's will.

Later in the time of King Solomon Israel was at peace and were prospering under the blessing of God. The bible says that "During Solomon's lifetime, all of Judah and Israel lived in peace and safety, From Dan in the north to Beersheba in the south, each family had its own home and garden." This blessing from God was intended as a picture to remind the people of the garden that had been lost and also to point forward to a garden that is yet to come.

The prophet Isaiah used the picture of the garden to illustrate both the good and the bad in peoples lives. Isaiah saw that the people of Israel had deserted God and were living in whatever way they felt they wanted to. In chapter 1 Isaiah says that

the people were "Like an oak with fading leaves, like a garden without water" Later Isaiah encourages those people who had realised their errant ways and sought to return to a right relationship with God. Isaiah says, in chapter 58, "The Lord will guide you always, He will satisfy your needs in a sun scorched land and will strengthen your frame. You will be like a well watered garden, like a spring whose waters never fail" Now that sounds like a much nicer garden.

Of course Isaiah does much more than talk about gardens, he points the way to someone who was coming some 700 years later. Isaiah knew that the sin that Adam had committed was still very much alive and living in him and indeed everybody else ever born or yet to come. He knew that the system of sacrificing bulls, goats and sheep was only temporary. In order for anyone to gain access to the eternal garden a perfect sacrifice would be needed. That could only be achieved if God's own Son came to give His life as that perfect sacrifice. Isaiah did not know the name of the person to come but he did know plenty about his life and death. We have the benefit now of knowing that the person Isaiah was talking about was Jesus.

Jesus lived amongst us as an ordinary man but unlike the rest of us He never sinned. In fact it was Isaiah who said "He had done no wrong and had never deceived anyone" Isaiah also told us that Jesus was "despised and rejected", that "He was pierced for our sins", "He was lead like a lamb to the slaughter" and that "He took up our weaknesses, it was our sorrows that weighed him down".

Jesus knew the task ahead of Him and as the time grew near He went to pray. Now of course the best place to do this would be in a garden. Matthew tells us in his gospel that Jesus "went out as usual to the mount of olives, and his disciples followed him" This olive grove was, in effect, a public garden and as it says Jesus had been there to pray many times before. Afterwards the apostle John picks up the story saying "When He had finished praying, Jesus left with His disciples, and crossed the Kidron Valley. On the other side there was a garden and He and his disciples went into it" It was in this garden that Jesus was betrayed into the hands of the authorities by Judas Iscariot.

In that first garden in Eden, God was betrayed by the one man's sin, which lead to death and decay. In the garden in Jerusalem, once more God was being betrayed by a man, however this time the outcome would be very different. Another death would result, that of Jesus on the cross, but Jesus did not stay dead. On the third day He rose again, victorious, over the power of death and decay that had resulted from Adam's sin. And on that glorious day of His resurrection where better to first

appear to someone than in a garden. As God had first appeared to a man, Adam, in the garden of Eden, now Jesus appeared to Mary Magdalene in the garden at the tomb. By this event in the garden Jesus has shown that He alone has the power over death. Power to overcome the sin of Adam and the curse of death. By trusting in Jesus, and walking with Him, we will one day walk with Him in a new garden, an eternal garden free from sin, death and decay, in which we can enjoy His presence for all of eternity.

As you enjoy your own garden, or maybe sit in the garden at church, remember the promise of that eternal garden in which you will one day rest, and give Him thanks.



STEVE ADSHEAD



Coach House Church

leadership@coachhousechurch.org //

0161 432 5604

the coach house church, 222 wellington road north, stockport sk4 2qn