



The Gardens of God
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How do you like the Gardens of New Beginnings?

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We love gardens.

When you walk into a garden and a sense of peace and well-being comes over you,
of sense of refreshment and vitality.

The place where our soul merges with the earth in a harmonious dance.

Gardens represent the creative energy of life.

And this resurrection morning, we invite you to the Gardens of God.

And pray you will sense the presence of the Risen Jesus walking among us.

It all began in a Garden

The Garden of Eden

Out of the primordial ooze God brought forth the heavens and the earth,

From **Genesis 2:**

⁸Now the LORD God planted a garden in the east, in Eden;

Eden means pleasantness.

God called it VERY GOOD.

and there he put the man he had formed . . .

¹⁵ in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it.

⁹The LORD God made all kinds of trees grow out of the ground—
trees that were pleasing to the eye and good for food.

In the middle of the garden were the tree of life
and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

¹⁶ And the Lord God commanded the man,
“You are free to eat from any tree in the garden;
¹⁷ but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil,
for when you eat from it you will certainly die.”

And we know the story.
Adam chose what he wanted over obedience to God,
and the pleasantness of the beautiful garden was shattered.

Garden of Eden became —The Garden of Defeat

²² And the Lord God said, “The man has now become like one of us, knowing good and evil. He must not be allowed to reach out his hand and take also from the tree of life and eat and live forever.” [In his broken condition]

And so to protect mankind . . .

²⁴ After he drove the man out, he placed on the east side of the Garden of Eden angels with a flaming sword flashing back and forth to guard the way to the tree of life.

Romans 5:12 and so . . .

For by one man sin entered the world, and death by sin, we all have sinned.

The course of human history was set in motion.
But that trajectory would be meet its match in another garden.

Garden of Gethsemane—

Mark 14:32-52 Jesus took the disciples and . . .

³² went to a place called Gethsemane, and Jesus said to his disciples, “Sit here while I pray.” ³³ He took Peter, James and John along with him, and he began to be deeply distressed and troubled. ³⁴ “My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death,” he said to them. “Stay here and keep watch.”

The Garden of Gethsemane was in an olive grove
Gethsemane means olive press – used to make olive oil.
Listen to how accurately this garden matched its divine purpose:

To make olive oil, the olives are first picked and washed.
Then they're crushed – sometimes between two big stones,
but now more commonly by steel blades.

John 19:41 says,

“Now in the place where [Jesus] was crucified there was a garden,
and in the garden a new tomb in which no one had yet been laid.”

And on the third day, Sunday . . . (**John 20**)

¹¹ Mary stood outside the tomb crying.

As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb ¹² and saw two angels in white, seated where Jesus' body had been, one at the head and the other at the foot.

This time the two angels are not guarding the entrance to the garden,
lest man should eat of the tree of life and live forever in his fallen state.
Now, the angels are guiding, pointing to *THE* tree of life
that whosoever will may be restored to eternal life.

The Garden of the empty tomb has become . . .

The Garden of New Creation

With Paul we can say, (**2 Corinthians 5:17**)

If any man be in Christ, he is a new creation.

Old things have passed away, behold, all things are become new.

That's what happens in a garden.

A seed falls to the ground and is dies, and something new grows.

Jesus did have options, you know. He didn't have to die.

He could have retreated to the desert and started a desert community,
like the Essenes at Qumran.

He would be a threat to no one;

lived in peace and written his memoirs.

Or he could have used the power of *others* better to his advantage:

He could have cooperated more diplomatically with the Pharisees
and used the entire religious system as his platform from which to speak.

He could cut a deal with Pilot

and work to influence the Roman empire from the inside.

OR, he could have used his own power to his advantage:

He could have led a rebellion

The people were seething with anger against Rome.

He could have tapped into that anger, led the rebellion,
and been the conqueror.

Or better yet could have called 10,000 angels and been delivered out of his suffering.
Wouldn't that dazzling display of power have proven just as effectively
that he was the Son of God?

We would have picked one of those options! Which option are people picking today?

But no.

His choice?

I will not run.

I will not deal.

I will not fight.

I will not dazzle.

I will die.

No man takes my life from me; I lay it down of my own accord!

We would have written off his choice, his way of doing life as sheer foolishness,
if he had not risen from the dead.

But he did! He rose.

Jesus, in rising from the dead, is reclaiming the original garden story.

Jesus is all the energy of the first creation now giving birth to a new creation.

The Garden of Gethsemane ends with the cross.

where we find forgiveness, making us right with God.

But the Garden of the Empty Tomb takes us beyond forgiveness

Romans 8:11 (NLT)

The Spirit of God, who raised Jesus from the dead, lives in you.

And just as God raised Christ Jesus from the dead,

he will give life to your mortal bodies by this same Spirit living within you.

Have we even begun to tap into that creative power?

We're born again. raised to a higher consciousness.

We wake up to how the world options have taken our God-given creative energies

Far off course.

We see it.

We see our risen Lord, standing in stark contrast to all the ways of the world,

And we are changed.

The resurrection proclaims and echoes down through time –
There is a different **WAY** of being human, a new **WAY** of doing life.
There is a new **TRUTH** bursting forth,
 a new understanding of the reality that governs the entire universe.
There is a new source of **LIFE** –
 a new regenerate energy that we sense within us and all around.
And this **WAY**, this **TRUTH** and this **LIFE**
 emanates *from* and always lead *to* the Father.

Or as Jesus said . . .
I am the way, the truth and the life,
 no man comes to the Father but by me. John 14:6

Not a check list of doctrinal statements,
 Not a neat formula for getting to heaven.
 It's the entire essence or a new creation.

It's the Spirit of God . . .
It's the same nuclear, creative energy that flung creation into existence,
It's the power that raised Jesus from the dead,
 is the power that comes to life in you.

There is afoot a new creation and we are invited to we step into,
 or perhaps better said, to *fall* into Jesus.
We feel the pull of this new reality, and our soul says, YES.
 Perhaps that's what saints of old called the leap of faith.
We stop debating in our minds; we stop resisting in our hearts,
 and we simply say, YES,
 and fall into Jesus.
And we spend the rest of our lives learning how to live in this new reality,
 struggling to *stay* in this reality.

We are so prone to lean out and go our own way, but then we fall back into Jesus.

And we continue the struggle to stay the course because of the great hope
 that there is yet one final garden.

Garden of the New Heaven and Earth—The Garden of Eternal Glory

Revelation 22:1-3

Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, as clear as crystal,
flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb [Jesus]
down the middle of the great street of the city.
On each side of the river stood the tree of life, bearing twelve crops of fruit,
yielding its fruit every month.
And the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations.
No longer will there be any curse.
The throne of God and of the Lamb will be in the city,
and his servants will serve him.

This is the garden we dream of, we long for,
God has placed this vision of perfection in our hearts and minds.
That's why we get so disappointed.
Because we can envision something better!
But if there is no heaven,
why would God place such vision of perfection in our hearts and minds?
Why would he taunt us?
Why would he set us up for disappointment?
Unless of course there is one final garden of eternal glory.

It is this vision that drives us to God.
And we cry out like the Psalmist . . .
**My soul yearns, even faints, for the courts [gardens] of the LORD;
my heart and my flesh cry out for the living God. Psalm 84:2**
We know that the final Garden will be our reality – and so we don't settle.

There you go. The entire story of the Bible is woven together
through the story of God's Gardens,
with the empty tomb, the resurrection as the centerpiece,
the great mystery of the ages revealed,
the power of God unto salvation for all who believe.
Jesus Christ, the Risen Lord, the centerpiece of history, who was and is and is to come.

BENEDICTION

May you release your garden of defeat in the garden of surrender
May you embrace the forgives of the cross
And fall into the life-giving garden of the new creation
As we together await the garden of eternal glory.
Amen