

My Thoughts for Sunday, 3 July 2016

“The Three Gardens of God”

*“I am the true 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 15:1-2

Can one even begin to imagine those initial feelings of Adam and Eve when they were first introduced to God’s Garden of Eden? This garden, we are told was full of all the plants God had created for man’s pleasure and sustenance. The trees of every variety, many bearing edible fruit. There were flowering shrubs some probably bearing berries of all kinds, good for food. Then came the myriad of flowers of every imaginable variety, color and fragrance. How amazed might these two new children of God be when viewing their glorious surroundings. And this was not all. God had also given them every kind of bird and fowl, animal and beast, fish and reptile, and we can only imagine what other lifeforms that have since become extinct through man’s imperfection and abuse because of their fall into sin. This was all for mankind to name, tame, and enjoy for eternity. They lost it all! For one sinful act of disobedience, the violation of the only rule their Creator had given them, they threw it all away and were cast out into the wilds. (Gen 1:11-12, 20-22, 24-25)

Growing up as a child on the outskirts of a small New England town, nestled in the pine forests so common to the area, I have fond memories of another such garden. In my early years it was my “Garden of Eden,” although somewhat transformed from the original. Oh yes, we had a large variety of trees; pine, oak, maple, ash, poplar, my favorite birch, and others in lesser quantities. We had our share of fruit trees; apple, peach, pear, cherry, etc., depending on the area. But, we also had the thistles and thorn bushes that God had placed as part of His curse due to Adam’s sin. *“And unto Adam he said, Because thou hast hearkened unto the voice of thy wife, and hast eaten of the tree, of which I commanded thee, saying, Thou shalt not eat of it: cursed is the ground for thy sake; in sorrow shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life; Thorns also and thistles shall it bring forth to thee; and thou shalt eat the herb of the field; In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground; for out of it wast thou taken: for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return.”* (Gen3:17-19)

Many of the thorn bushes bore edible berries, if you were brave enough and very cautious in gathering them. I remember as a youth rushing out in the early spring to find the first wildflowers, lady slippers and violets, appearing where the snow had melted and the earth was warming. Then came the very low, ground hugging wintergreen, strawberries and blueberries that were so sweet and welcome after our cold New England winters. Mom

and Dad always worked our family flower garden, for Mom, and vegetables, for Dad and the family. We had pets and even some wild animals that would grace our “Garden of Eden” especially in the winter when food was sparse. Birds were plentiful and welcomed with joy for their songs. We had fish in the streams and brooks running very near our garden. Unfortunately, this garden is fast disappearing as so-called progress is encroaching on the countryside for more housing and business.

God’s third garden is the one we should all be most concerned with today. Like the first “Garden of Eden” and my “Garden of Eden” God continues to show all of His same attributes. He shows His love of variety and His love of beauty. He shows His great love for His ultimate creation, mankind. Looking back to that first Garden of Eden when Adam sinned, God could have justifiably wiped out His creation and started over. But, for our sake, He didn’t. Instead, He promised Adam and Eve in that first garden that He would send a Savior. *“And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel.”* (Gen 3:15) Someone would be born in their descendants that would come and redeem us all from the power of sin, death and the devil. That Savior did come, in God’s time, according to His plan, and has redeemed us all. The sacrifice of our Lord has washed us clean and justified us with our Creator.

We are that third Garden of God. Jesus likens us as in His vineyard. See what He says in the gospel of John. *“I am the true 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. You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you. Remain in me, as I also remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me. “I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.”* (John 15:1-5)

We are unique, individual flowers in His garden, branches of His vine. We are being cultivated by the Holy Spirit, having been pruned of our sins and made clean in God’s eyes. Our uniqueness very clearly shows that our loving God still loves variety. We can rest assured that this loving God of ours still loves us all as diverse individuals. He is encouraging us to bring more of His special creation, His flowers, into this garden to glorify Him. As we continue to grow and flourish in His love we become more beautiful in His sight and are being prepared to be taken home to live eternally in His new heavens and new earth that is spoken of so beautifully in His holy Word. *“See, I will create new heavens and a new earth. The former things will not be remembered, nor will they come to mind.”* (Isaiah 65:17)

Won’t you join me in this Garden of God and be prepared by the Holy Spirit for your new and eternal home with your Creator?

