

Maundy Thursday

On Maundy Thursday we remember Jesus washing his disciples' feet, breaking bread and taking wine, commanding them to '*do this in remembrance of me*', and then praying in the Garden of Gethsemane. These first two we do in this service, reminding ourselves of his great love for us, but this evening I want to reflect on the third.

I want to link the garden of Gethsemane to three other gardens in the Bible, to help us connect the story together.

In the first book of the Bible we read, '*The Lord God planted a garden in **Eden**, in the east.*' (Genesis 2:8) This first garden was a **Paradise**, where Adam and Eve were called to look after and care for this beautiful place, where they could speak and meet freely with God. Of course, the story is of them doing the one thing God forbade them to do, to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, and how when '*they heard the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden at the time of the evening breeze.. they hid themselves*', (Genesis 3:8) because they were now afraid and ashamed before God, and were banished from the loveliness of the garden and of God's closeness. This depicts the alienation we often feel from God, cut off from the source of our being, which brings a brokenness of relationships with God, with each other, and with the earth, and the detrimental effects of this upon our minds and bodies. These are the themes which we may have reflected on and encountered during Lent, as we have sought to repent of our sins and grow closer to God.

The second garden is **Gethsemane**, a place of old gnarled olive trees, which you can still visit today. Jesus went there often to pray. It was here that Jesus agonised in prayer, until, as Luke tells us, his tears were like the blood he would shed the next day on the cross. In his prayer Jesus won a battle against the power and temptation to do his own thing, to go his own way and not God's way, one that we all face. Unlike Adam, he kept faith with the Father's will. St Paul calls Jesus '*the second Adam*', (1 Corinthians 15) as he came to put right all that went wrong in the first Adam. Jesus had asked the disciples to stay with him and pray, but they fell asleep. Jesus comments, '*the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak*', (Matthew 26:41) This is the reality of our humanity.

The third garden is **Joseph of Arimathea's garden**, called **Golgotha**, where Jesus' lifeless body was placed in a new tomb. When the women came in darkness on that first Easter morning, they found the tomb empty. All except Mary Magdalene returned, to tell the other disciples. Mary sat weeping. A figure appears, and Mary assumes the risen Christ must be the **gardener**. In a most profound sense he was the gardener, because at that moment a whole new creation began, a new heaven and earth. Jesus, by his death and resurrection started a new way of being, which we call eternal life. Death was now conquered, the power of all that spoils our lives and our world was broken. Forgiveness and acceptance were now available to all who would follow Jesus, and embrace this new world. This enables St Paul to write,

'As all die in Adam, so all will be made alive in Christ.' (1 Corinthians 15:22)

G K Chesterton wrote: (*The Everlasting Man*.)

*'On the third day, the friends of Christ coming at daybreak to the place, found the grave empty and the stone rolled away. In varying ways they realized.. that the world had died in the night. What they were looking at was the first day of a new creation, with a new heaven and a new earth; and in a semblance of the **gardener** God walked again in the garden, in the cool not of the evening but the dawn.'*

Finally, the fourth garden is truly **Paradise** restored. This one will never be spoiled, never fade, never pass away. In the last book of the Bible we read, *'Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth.. the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God... On either side of the river is the tree of life.. and the leaves.. are for the healing of the nations... The throne of God.. will be in it and his servants will worship him, they will see his face... there will be no more night,.. for the Lord God will be their light.'*
(Revelation 21:1; 22:1-5)

It is a picture of heaven, filled with the light, love, joy and peace of God, to which we journey. Jesus spoke of heaven as a place where we will see him face to face, we will know as we are known, and we will be with him forever. Jesus offered reassurance and hope in the face of life's struggles, and in the face of death itself.

He restored what Adam lost, to know God as close to us, as we follow and trust him. The way is never easy, it goes through suffering to glory, but it is the way of life eternal. We are all invited to walk this way, to experience this new life. This is the hope we will celebrate so joyfully on Easter Day. But this evening and tomorrow we continue to reflect on our own humanity and God's great love for us, shown in Jesus Christ.