

“God’s Gardens”

Matthew 26:36-47a (Genesis 1:8-9, 15; Revelation 22:1-5)

**Beginning, End, Middle: the Tale of Three Gardens**

Look at all this green in here! I love that on Palm Sunday and Easter our worship space is filled with life! It looks like a garden in here. Speaking of gardens... [Image—Wellfield BG]  
...anyone know where this image is from?

Did you know that there is a botanical garden reciprocity program? If you hold membership at one botanical garden, you can get into hundreds of others across the country for reduced cost, or even free. The Wellfield Botanic Gardens right here in Elkhart, participates in this program.

So I thought, hey, our family is going on vacation, we love the gardens, we like to get our toddler outside in a safe place to just go nuts, what if we visited some of these gardens on vacation? Plus, FREE, am I right?

[2 Images—Erie Co. BG near Buffalo, Cleveland BG]

These images are pulled off the internet because we didn’t visit either of these gardens! When I planned our trip, I had no idea it was going to be so cold, and it would snow! But you get the idea.

Some of you already know about this *sweet deal*, and everyone else is thinking, “I gotta get in on that”, but let me tell you the real deal, and I bet you already knew this, gardens in the Bible are really important. In the Bible, the story of humanity begins and ends in a garden. Not only that, but the gardens in the Bible are connected too—specifically three gardens: Eden, Gethsemane, and the Garden-City.

1. Eden—[Image—Eden]
  - a. give background / brief synopsis (Eden is recorded at the beginning of the Bible in Genesis, good, good, good, very good, Adam, Eve, the fruit, disobeyed God, sent out from the garden, that is humanity’s beginning)
2. Gethsemane—[Image—Shankov’s Gethsemane]
  - a. give background / brief synopsis (Gospels, the chief priests and elders plot to kill Jesus, Judas is set to betray Jesus, then they celebrate Passover together and the Lord’s Supper, Gethsemane is between the Last Supper and the betrayal and arrest of Jesus, Jesus goes to dark Gethsemane to pray, with three disciples—Peter, James and John, the disciples fall asleep, Jesus prays, Judas comes with Roman guards, Peter swings sword and cuts off a guards ear)
3. Garden-City—[3 Images—Miles’ River of Life, Revelation eternity concept, LOTR Rivendell]

- a. give background / brief synopsis (you maybe have heard this called New Earth, New Jerusalem, I had a really hard time finding a good image, poor theology, just saying, you want to take this on... but we just have a hint of this at the end of Revelation)

Looking at the big picture, we've got gardens at the beginning and end of the grand story. Notice the similarities with Eden and the Garden-City. [Chart #1]

| Eden                                       | Garden-City                                |
|--|--|
| Tended<br>Community<br>Peaceful<br>Lover's | Tended<br>Community<br>Peaceful<br>Lover's |

- a. A tended garden (cultivated, ordered, care and regular involvement, weeded—there is a gardener who created and who returns regularly)
- b. A community garden, for all life
- c. A peaceful garden, no violence, no evidence of death or decay
- d. A lover's garden, God is in love with His people and His people are in love with Him and together God and the people provide loving care for all other life

But something went horribly wrong. We don't live in either of these gardens. We live somewhere in between. How do we get from this garden to this garden?

A third garden, Gethsemane, is the symbolic connecting point; on the way from Eden to the Garden-City humanity must go through Gethsemane. Gethsemane is very different from Eden or the Garden-City because Gethsemane is caught between the power of God and the powers of sin and evil and death and darkness and violence.

[Chart #2]

| Eden                                       | Gethsemane   | Garden-City                                |
|--|--|--|
| Tended<br>Community<br>Peaceful<br>Lover's | Tended / Neglected<br>Community / Loneliness<br>Peace / Violence<br>Love / Hate / Hurt | Tended<br>Community<br>Peaceful<br>Lover's |

Notice the tension here. [we see it in the story and we experience in our life]

## God in Gethsemane: Jesus Redeems the Past and Provides Hope for the Future

[Image—Gethsemane Today] Here is what Gethsemane looks like today.

Matthew 26:36-47a CEB

Then Jesus went with His disciples to a place called Gethsemane. He said to the disciples, “Stay here while I go and pray over there.” When He took Peter and Zebedee’s two sons, He began to feel sad and anxious. Then He said to them, “I’m very sad. It’s as if I’m dying. Stay here and keep alert with me.” Then He went a short distance farther and fell on His face and prayed, “My Father, if it’s possible, take this cup of suffering away from me. However—not what I want but what you want.”

He came back to the disciples and found them sleeping. He said to Peter, “Couldn’t you stay alert one hour with me? Stay alert and pray so that you won’t give in to temptation. The spirit is eager, but the flesh is weak.” A second time He went away and prayed, “My Father, if it’s not possible that this cup be taken away unless I drink it, then let it be what you want.”

Again He came and found them sleeping. Their eyes were heavy with sleep. But He left them and again went and prayed the same words for the third time. Then He came to His disciples and said to them, “Will you sleep and rest all night? Look, the time has come for the Human One to be betrayed into the hands of sinners. Get up. Let’s go. Look, here comes my betrayer.”

While Jesus was still speaking, Judas, one of the Twelve, came.

Eden represents what the world should have been, Gethsemane represents the world as it is, and the Garden-City represents what the world will become when the resurrecting process concludes.

In Eden, God created Adam (literally in Hebrew, “ha’adam” which we could translate as “a human being”), God creates the first human being, who then serves as the initial representative for all humanity. Then when Jesus comes, God serves as the representative human being, a sort of Second Adam.

There’s a poetry, there’s a symmetry, to the parallels between Eden and Gethsemane. Listen to how God reverses things, or flips things, how Jesus redeems the past.

1. In Eden, Adam’s life began. In Gethsemane, Christ’s life halted.
2. In Eden, Adam sinned. In Gethsemane, Christ undid the effects of Peter’s sin.
3. In Eden, Adam fell from grace. In Gethsemane, Christ invited grace back into the world.
4. In Eden, Adam hid from God. In Gethsemane, Christ presented Himself to God in prayer.
5. In Eden, the angel’s sword was drawn. In Gethsemane, Christ sheathed Peter’s sword.

6. In Eden, Adam brought shame upon humanity. In Gethsemane, Christ restored humanity's honor.
7. In Eden, Adam placed his trust in his own knowledge and goodness. In Gethsemane, Christ placed His trust in God's knowledge and goodness.
8. In Eden, Adam made a choice to be disobedient. In Gethsemane, Christ made a choice to be obedient.
9. In Eden, humanity was cast out by God. In Gethsemane, God was dragged out by humans.
10. In Eden, Adam brought death to life. In Gethsemane, Christ prepared to bring life from death.

Jesus didn't accidentally find Himself in Gethsemane. God chose to go to Gethsemane. For us. For this world.

That choice was costly. It was literally a life and death choice. Jesus went that night to Gethsemane knowing He would be betrayed.

So why go? Jesus went to redeem the past and provide hope for the future. Redemption.

Redeem means to "gain or regain possession of (something) in exchange for payment." When we talk about redemption what we mean is this: this world was possessed, and God is re-possessing His world, He's taking it back—and this is good news.

Evil took possession of the world after Eden, not full possession, but possession nonetheless, it staked its claim, and God is re-possessing His world, He's taking it back, and that is why Gethsemane is important, because for humanity to get from the Garden of Eden to the Garden-City described in John's Revelation, something spectacularly unexpected had to happen: Jesus.

Do you remember the botanical garden reciprocity agreement?—if you possess membership to one botanical garden you can get into the other botanical gardens too—Jesus' visit to Gethsemane makes our visit to the Garden-City possible; we get to use His membership ticket. If we meet Jesus in this world, and we give our life to Him, we get to live life with Him now in this garden, and we get to go with Him into the next garden.

This is how God's Gardens work now.

### **Living in Gethsemane: What about us?**

Our God has come to us in Jesus Christ.

In Jesus, God went through an incarnation process, was born into this world as a real human person, lived and breathed in this very world, one foot in the ruins of humanity, one foot in the

Kingdom of Heaven, bringing a message and a promise and an access point to right-now healing and a future hope of living with God's people, in God's place, in God's full presence, forever;

In response, this world killed Him, we killed Him, placed Him on a cross where He hung until His human heart failed, and God died, and we buried Him.

But His God-heart still beat for humanity so strong and so fast that He did not stay dead, He rose from the dead, back to full life, and then ascended to the full height of glory, back to His rightful place to rule upon the forever throne of the eternal Kingdom.

God went through dark Gethsemane, and came out the other side.

But what about us? We still live in this world. We still live in dark Gethsemane. Why are we still here? Why hasn't God taken us on to that glorious Garden-City? Did God leave us behind? What hope do we have? How do we go on living in this in-between kind of garden?

We are still here for a reason. We are still here for a purpose.

Just as Jesus has gone through death before us, and resurrection before us, and on to God's perfect promised presence before us, so too He has gone through Gethsemane before us.

He has lived the frustrating messy middle of our human existence. And He has not abandoned us. He is still with us. Jesus gave us His Spirit, and that Spirit lives within us.

God has not abandoned this Gethsemane world. God plans to reclaim it, remake it, renew it. And God wants us to garden with Him.

God is straightening up this garden through you.

We're here now to garden with God.

***We are Apprentices:*** We are like junior gardeners or the big gardener's assistants. We are not the Master Gardener. We're here to learn from the Master.

This Gethsemane world is where we surrender to God and God's mission. We get the chance to say "yes" to God again and again: "yes, yes, yes". Yes, Master. Yes, Lord. Yes, Jesus. Yes, today and yes tomorrow.

We submit to God's instruction and His plan for His garden and the tasks He give us in this garden. We follow. We listen. We work.

And every new day that we wake up in this garden we decide if we are going to work with God or against God.

We are apprentices. You are an apprentice.

***We are Survivors:***

We all face Gethsemane-like experiences in this life.

We go through dark times in this life. I mean DARK.

1. Abuse
2. Addiction
3. Death of a loved one
4. Divorce
5. Mental illness
6. Suicide

Every one of those has impacted my life in a significant way.

Let's be honest. Sometimes we feel like we're not gonna make it. Sometimes we're not sure we want to make it. We retreat into our pain, distract ourselves, we think dark thoughts, and we ask terrifying questions in our head, not out loud... And Gethsemane matters because Jesus has been there.

I'm here to tell you, it's not just that God's going to make a way, God's already made a way. Jesus has been where you are, Jesus has made it through to the other side, and He's with you, taking you to that place.

We are survivors. You are a survivor—you are not overcome by the darkness, that light burns within you, God's Spirit is always with you. When you feel like you cannot face another day, tell yourself, "I'm a survivor, Jesus is leading me through."

***We are Caretakers:*** We don't own this garden—God does—but we have a responsibility to take care of it. You are a caretaker of God's amazing creation. Guess what caretakers do... they "take care" of whatever they've been given to take care of. God has tasked you with taking care of the life around you. Now that means people, relationships, but not just people. We're to take care of the plants and the animals too.

God's made life on this planet interdependent, meaning it all depends on each other. And as the height of God's creation, we humans, we're like big brothers and big sisters to all the other species. We take care of them for our Father.

God plants us in different places in His garden so that we might bring about His vision in every corner.

We are caretakers. You are a caretaker.

***We are Creators:*** God created Heaven and Earth, God created Eden, God created humanity, God created everything...

But we're not just looking after the creation that is, we are actually bringing forth new pieces of new creation. God is the Creator—capital “C”—but we are co-creating with God in little ways.

We talked earlier about the many similarities between Eden and the Garden-City, but there is a really cool difference I want to share. Eden was entirely the creation of God alone. Where we're headed, the Garden-City, it's partially the co-creation of people with God... garden... and city.

We are creators. You are a creator. You are a creative person. Don't let anybody tell you you're not. You are. God said so.

***We are Redeemers:*** Remember, to redeem is to re-possess or take back. We, like Jesus, are “buying back” God's world by giving our very lives in exchange.

Through loving sacrifice, you can help in taking this world back from evil. That's what God's done in Jesus. And what God is continuing to do through His Spirit. And what He wants to do with His Church.

We are redeemers. You are a redeemer.

***We are Healers:*** There is something amazing about being healed... something about the scars we bear... that we can say “I've been there, but now I'm here”. Henri Nouwen called Christians “wounded healers”, but we're not ignoring our wounds and letting them fester, we continue to give our wounds to Christ, right? So maybe we're “still healing healers”. You are a meant to heal. I don't mean we should all go into healthcare as a career choice. In your everyday life, wherever you find yourself, be healing. Be healing.

We've been healed so that we may heal. And the primary way that we heal others is that we give them Christ *the Healer*.

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So this week, as we move toward Good Friday, know that Jesus has been to and through Gethsemane ahead of you. This week, as we move toward Easter morning, know that Jesus redeems the past and provides hope for the future. This week, as God raises the dead to new life, and does a new thing in you, know that God loves you, God has a purpose for you, God is with you, and God desires for you to join Him in His gardening work.

God bless you. In the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

## Take-Home Handout

Reflection Questions for Take Home Handout:

### Discovering Life in God's Gardens

Eden (Our Past)

1. Do you have a sense of how things are not as they should be in our world?
2. Do you ever think about your own fall from Eden (your messes, mistakes, mishaps)?

Gethsemane (Our Present)

3. Read **Colossians 1:15-20**. Do you have a sense of how all things come together in Christ?
4. Do you believe that Jesus can redeem your past?

Garden-City (Our Future)

5. Read **Revelation 22:1-6, 12-14, 16-17, 20-21**. Do you have a good picture of what is to come?
6. Read **1 John 5:13** and **1 Peter 1:3-6**. Do you have that kind of hope?

### Gardening with God

You are an Apprentice

1. How well do you submit to God?
2. In what area of your life today do you need to say "God, not my will, but Your will be done"?

You are a Survivor

3. Do you have a sense that God is there for you always, even in the darkest times?
4. How do you call on God for strength?

You are a Caretaker

5. How well do you care for the things (resources, time, energy, your body, ministry tasks, creation) God has entrusted to you?
6. How could you take better care of the people God has given you?

You are a Creator

7. How could you cooperate with God to create beautiful new things?

You are a Redeemer

8. Where can you see God working to repossess this world from evil?
9. What sacrifices are you willing to make to join God in His mission?

You are a Healer

10. If you were to ask God what healing your community (church, neighborhood, and world) needs, what do you think His answer would be?
11. If you were to ask God what part you have to play in that healing, what do you think His answer would be?
12. How is the Spirit working through you to heal the wounds of those around you?