

From Garden to Garden

Genesis 3:1-13, 22-24

Introduction

Ben was born in 1882 in Edenville, Pennsylvania and moved to Springfield in 1912. He worked as a molder at the foundry of the Springfield Machine Tool Company.

- Unfortunately, in 1932, because of the Great Depression, Ben lost his job.
- Not content with his new sedentary lifestyle, he began to construct a cement fishing pond in his backyard.
- By the time the project was finished, Ben was hooked. For the remaining 12 years of his life, Ben constructed hundreds of structures and figurines for his new garden, following the themes of history, religion, patriotism, and popular culture.
- Ben drew inspiration from family and friends, as well as from magazines, books, radio, and film. He constructed every object by hand between 1932 and 1944 using concrete, metal, glass, stone, wood, and whatever else he could find.
- Ben's garden was a deeply personal space, meant to promote his ideals and values to the larger world.
- Sadly, Ben died from an occupational lung disease in 1944.
- For the next fifty-three years, his wife Mary took on the monumental task of maintaining Ben's garden, caring for the wide array of flowers, preserving Ben's intriguing structures, giving tours, and even adding small details where she saw fit.
- The result for us is one of our community's great treasures: The Hartman Rock Garden.

As we come into this season of Lent, I have been thinking about gardens a lot. Gardens of every kind.

- Which in some ways is odd ... because I am not typically a garden guy.
- Some of you are garden experts, but I would never qualify for that title.
- But nonetheless, my mind has been on gardens.

My primary inspiration for these garden thoughts has been the stained-glass window behind me.

- Many days when I need a quiet space to sit and think, I come into the Sanctuary. It's a peaceful place – one we all need to take greater advantage of.
- And during many of those quiet times I focus on this stained-glass window.
- As you know, it depicts Jesus in prayer in a garden – the Garden of Gethsemane.
- In the past I have focused on the “prayer” part of the picture, but God has led me to think about the “garden” part these days.

Regardless of our gardening skills, you and I are garden people. Did you realize that?

- Our story began in a garden.
- And throughout our lives we are on a journey toward another garden.
- From Garden to Garden ... that is the story of our lives.
- And that is our theme for this Lenten season.

The starting point of our story is the Garden of Eden – described in the text for today's message.

- There the Scriptures teach us that:

Now the Lord God had planted a garden in the east, in Eden; and there he put the man he had formed. (Genesis 2:8)

The name “Eden” means “delightful.” And our first garden was exactly that. One commentator writes:

Eden was a lush and beautiful utopia filled with vegetable and fruit trees, blooming plants, and rivers. It was a sinless environment where Adam and Eve enjoyed a personal relationship with their Creator.

EDEN WAS A PLACE ...

1. Where people could meet with God.
 - Genesis 3:8 tells us that our Creator would walk in the garden in the cool of the day so that Adam and Eve could be with Him and talk with Him.
2. Of total provision.
 - God had seen to every detail in designing a home for the people He created. Adam and Eve lacked nothing.
3. Of unity and fellowship.
 - Eve was created in the garden and brought to Adam so that would have “a helper suitable for him.”
 - The unity and fellowship enjoyed by the human couple was a reflection of the unity and fellowship they both enjoyed with God.
4. Of work and fulfillment.
 - Mankind was blessed by God, given responsibility, and provided work that was meaningful, creative, and beneficial.
5. For the first marriage.
 - It's in the Garden of Eden that marriage is defined as the union of one man and one woman who have left their parents to form a new family unit.
6. Of innocence.
 - Originally, there was no sin in the garden and nothing that would cause anxiety or unrest.
7. Of life.
 - In the middle of the garden was the tree of life. and Adam and Eve had free, unhindered access to it.

Sounds absolutely delightful, doesn't it?

EDEN WAS ALSO A PLACE

1. Of testing.
 - in the middle of the garden was another tree – the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.
 - Throughout the centuries, scholars have tried to describe what this tree was all about, and what they have written is pretty interesting reading sometimes.
 - But the important thing is – not what the tree was – but that God said, “stay away from it.”
 - It was the one and only prohibition in the Garden of Eden.

God had created Adam and Eve to be free, with a moral sense and the ability to make decisions and choose for themselves. The presence of a forbidden tree provided the opportunity for Adam and Eve to make a real, necessary choice to either obey or disobey.

Unfortunately, Adam failed the test. Taking the form of a serpent, Satan tempted our first parents with a false promise of blessing, and they did exactly what God told them not to do. They choose to disregard God's word and believe Satan's lie.

The consequences of their sin were disastrous for them and for every human being born after them. Their innocence was lost. They lost their home. But most importantly, they lost their fellowship with God.

As a result, the Scriptures tell us that:

...the Lord God banished (Adam and Eve) from the Garden of Eden to work the ground from which he had been taken. After he drove them out, he placed on the east side of the Garden of Eden cherubim and a flaming sword flashing back and forth to guard the way to the tree of life. (Genesis 3:23-24)

To borrow the title of John Milton's epic poem, their Paradise was Lost.

One of the greatest lies of the devil is his attempt to convince us that sin is not a big deal.

Maybe that lie works, because you and I have never experienced Eden. We don't really know what we have lost. We only know life outside of Eden. Maybe that's why the devil's lie is so effective.

One of the goals of the season of Lent is to remind us of that paradise has been lost, and to make us long for its return.

As you know Grace has 11,000 square feet of garden space. By mid-summer, it will be beautiful and lush. It will be producing thousands of pounds of yummy vegetables. Isn't your stomach already hungry for the sweet corn?

- But right now, the garden is empty and barren. It is lifeless and dull.

Those two images of our Grace garden will serve you well this Lenten season, as we move from Garden to Garden.

- On the one end of our journey is our banishment from the Garden of Eden into a life that is barren and without God – all because of the entry of sin into our lives.
- At the other end of our journey is the garden where the empty tomb of Christ is found. There is life and beauty and God.

One day, as we walk in faith, we will reach the second garden. But our journey begins here, just outside the Garden of Eden.

Over these next seven weeks, I would like to encourage you to memorize these words of Scripture. They are our theme verses for this Lenten season:

For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead comes also through a man. For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive. (1 Corinthians 15:21-22)

Two gardens represented by two people. Garden to Garden.

Amen.