

The Church: God's Garden

February 18, 2024

Welcome to the Beamsville Church of Christ Online Ministry. This week's message is titled "The Church, God's Garden." The scripture reading is 1 Corinthians 3, 1-9. Thank you to Rhonda, Dave, Toluwani, and Don for being part of the video. Happy Birthday this week to Benjamin.

Welcome, Announcements, Prayer

Good morning, everyone. Good morning. Happy Birthday, Janet and Daniel. We mean Daniel, old Daniel, not Daniel, young Daniel. Okay. Yes, and we need this Janet and Daniel. And Dianne, who is walking in right now, is updating the church directory and speak to her if you'd like to be included or you want to change your contact information. Anything like that.

February the 23rd, 645, that's an interesting time, is Games Night in the Fellowship Hall. And if you want more details, speak to Barbara and Helen. And are we to bring games? Yes? Yes, bring games with you. And the annual meeting is on the 25th. So I guess the 23rd is a Friday night. 25th is Sunday. Daniel meetings right after service. And speak to Adam if you'd like to become a Corporation member and be eligible to vote. And we have mission updates from New Guinea, from Japan, from France, and they're all on that global family bulletin board at the back if you'd like to read that.

And prayers. Oh my goodness. Helen's parents are scheduled to come to Canada on Thursday? Oh, I didn't know that. Helen's sister got as far as Halifax several months ago. Peter's wife came a week or two ago. And now Helen's parents are coming. Wow, that's pretty exciting. And they'll probably be in Halifax. Okay. Oh, and this is good news. Marie's grandson Brayden is home from the hospital. But he still has a feeding tube and swallowing issues that are undiagnosed. But at least he's home from the hospital. So that's a good sign. This is a 19-year-old who's going through this. This is a tough go for a kid to have to go through.

And news I have, Pam is still in Niagara Falls Hospital. No particular changes. The only thing that changes with her is her room. Her room number changes about every few days. And it changed yesterday, which I'm not sure what room number is now. But the good-- it's always a good idea as you're going past the nurses station to say, "Where's Pam today?" Because I didn't do that once. And they have the curtains around them all the time. And I went whipping in around the curtain. And there was this man there who was not pleased to see me at all. So it's always wise to say, "Where's Pam today?" As you're going around. And a piece of good news this week.

Jonathan got an award at school for being a responsible citizen, which is pretty good. [APPLAUSE] And if you watch Jonathan on Sunday mornings when he comes in out of my car, he comes with us and he-- Jen takes him home. When he comes in out of my car, he's always carrying his booster seat. And it's not because anybody tells him to. So he is a responsible citizen. So they were made a good choice in choosing him.

I'm going to take my prayer today from Psalms 9. Ed and I have been doing this thing lately where we've been reading his Psalms. And then we try and turn it into a meaningful prayer for us. And we each do separate. So this is my prayer from Psalms 9. And I think it's appropriate for today.

God we're here to praise you with all of our hearts. We sing for joy because of you, almighty God. You are fair and honest. You are a king who rules with righteousness. Please give us safety from Satan. May we ever trust you. Please do not neglect the oppressed, the poor, the sick, or the needy. Give us an attitude of here am I, Lord. Send me. In Jesus' name, amen.

Communion

Some thoughts. They may be a little tangential to begin with, but we'll get there. Although our winter so far has not been particularly harsh, we anticipate spring. Season of rebirth, regrowth, regeneration, rejuvenation of the dormant plants that are now around us.

Some of you are gardeners. I know several of you garden and enjoy that pursuit. I also am anticipating the garden. Already beginning to plan to arrange to configure where to put plants or seeds or whatever. And I find that communing with nature through the garden provides me with a sense of discovery and perhaps some degree of control over my surroundings. However, it is humbling when I come to realize what a very small part I actually play in this amazing process. Gardens share a common ability to kind of pull us in. So completely that sometimes self-awareness just disappears. And for a brief moment at least, we're transported into kind of a timeless awareness. Noting there is greatness at work here, not my work. But there is a mystical quality no matter what the actual content of your garden is. Gardens always seem to give back more than they receive. There's a closeness with God, the creator from Genesis right from the beginning. Where was it? A garden.

And so connecting and applying a few basic principles and understanding of gardens helps us see the power of God. And it reaches far beyond the soil. But in the depths of the hearts of the people, the garden really lives. It is an expression of faith, embodiment of hope, and a song of praise. This is only the beginning of what is created when with the direction of the Spirit and the example of Christ, those things are allowed to affect our lives. It's notable and intriguing that this growth process in us, like the plants of our garden, no two plants are exactly alike. They can come from the same seed, but they're not the same. No two trees that you see are exactly the same. I'll have a different amount of branches, roots, leaves, and here we are. People.

Nobody is exactly the same as you are. You are unique. And so with the differences that we note in shape and color and size and all that kind of stuff, here we are, together as one. Similar in some ways to plants, but all different. We have had all different experiences this week. None of us have experienced the same thing. Each of us have. Contacts, conversations, whatever. The week has brought you a unique individual, unique experiences. To bring that all together is a comforting experience in itself. But to express our continued faith in the power and love of God through Christ, through the table, that's special. The emblems are the same, but we who take them, it's affecting us all different ways. It's a gift. We continue to be amazed. The body and the blood of Christ. The sacrifice of Christ. The gift and the direction of the Holy Spirit in our lives to bear fruit. Let's pray.

Father, sometimes the world around us leaves us straining to see your light. Father, we are constantly amazed at the continual gift of your grace and provision each day in abundance. Father, we thank you for Christ, for His sacrifice, for your sacrifice, for your love. Bless us as we remember Jesus through the body and the blood that we take in remembrance of Him. The greatest of all gifts. We thank you and we praise you in the name of your Son, Jesus. Amen.

Reading

The reading is taken from 1 Corinthians 3 verses 1-9.

Brothers and sisters, I could not address you as people who live by the Spirit, but as people who are still worldly, mere infants in Christ. I gave you milk, not solid food, for you are not ready for it yet. Indeed, you are still not ready. You are still worldly. For since there is jealousy and quarreling among you, are you not worldly? Are you not acting like mere humans? For when one says, "I follow Paul," and another, "I follow Apollos," are you not mere human beings?

What after all is Apollos, and what is Paul? Many servants through whom you came to believe, as the Lord has assigned to each his task. I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God has been making it grow. So neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but only God who makes things grow. The one who plants and the one who waters have one purpose, and they will each be rewarded according to their own labour. For we are co-workers in God's service, and you are God's field, God's building. Thank you.

Message

The Church: God's Garden

Good morning, everyone. Church can be fun. I'd like to spend some time talking about God's garden, the church. I find it fascinating how the Bible begins in a garden, and how the Bible concludes in a garden. There are gardens mentioned many times in scripture. Isaiah says that God will guide us always, and we will be like a well-watered garden, like a spring whose waters never fail. So let's go back to the beginning. Church, God's garden. And if you would, just picture in your mind what Genesis says. This is how it happened.

In the Garden of Eden, it says this. Now no shrub had yet appeared on the earth, and no plant had yet sprung up. For the Lord God had not sent rain on the earth, and there was no one to work the ground, but streams came up from the earth and watered the whole surface of the ground. Then the Lord formed a man from the dust of the ground, and God breathed into the man's nostrils, and he had the breath of life, and the man became a living being. All of us have come from that very beginning. Now the Lord God had planted a garden in the east, in Eden, and there he put the man, whom he had formed. The Lord God made all kinds of trees grow out of the ground, trees that were pleasing to the eye, and trees that were good for food. In the middle of the garden were the tree of life, and the tree of knowledge of good and evil. A river watering the garden flowed from Eden. From there it was separated into four headwaters. The name of the first is the Pishon. It winds through the entire land of Havilah, where there was gold, and the gold in that land was good. Aromatic resin and onyx were also there. The name of the second river is the Gihon. It winds through the entire land of Kush. The name of the third river is the Tigris. We've heard of that. It runs along the east side of Asher. And the fourth river is the Euphrates. Now that might not mean too much to us, but I spent a lot of time picturing this in my mind, how God started with this garden. He could have started any way he chose to start, but he started with this garden that's going to be overflowing, pleasant, pleasing, wonderful. So what's the man going to do? The fourth river is the Euphrates. The Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to work it first job and to take care of it. The Lord God commanded the man, "You are free to eat from any tree in the garden, but you must not eat from the tree of knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat it, you will certainly die." First temptation. Here you have everything you could

ever need, everything you could ever want, wonderful food to eat, all of the joys, everything else, but not that. You must not eat from that tree of knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat it, you will die. So God's requirements seemed amazing. We would think that all would be well throughout all eternity, but then sin entered this picture. And Adam and Eve learned the painful, painful consequences of sin. God's beautiful garden was tarnished forever. They would never be allowed to enter into Eden again. I sometimes wonder that when it's our turn and that we go to heaven, if maybe heaven isn't heaven and Eden altogether at once, I guess we'll find out someday. But it was tarnished.

So God, even though it was tarnished, never leaves us abandoned, never. In Revelation 22, listen to these words. 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 down in 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. In that garden, all things could be made well. Sickness would be gone. Everything would be beautiful. Lots of food to eat. Just enjoy. Be part of it." And then it talks about, "This is such a beautiful thing that in the future, the healing of all the nations will take place, and there will no longer be death. There will no longer be all these negative things in this world." Who knew? Who knew? It all started in the garden. From a garden to a new heaven and a new earth. God allows John to see what we may see. Listen to his words. "Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, and I saw the holy city coming down out of heaven from God. Not going up, coming down." And then it says, "God's dwelling place is now with all the people, and God will dwell with us." That's a promise. It's going to happen. We will be part of it. It's beautiful. He will wipe every tear from our eyes. There will be, oh, how precious is this? There will be no more death. None. None. There will be no more death. And there will be no more mourning, not early mourning, but mourning pouring out of the eyes. There will be no more mourning. There will be no more crying. There will be no more pain. For all those things will pass away. And here's what God said right from the beginning. "I am making," listen, "everything new." "I am making everything new, from the Garden of Eden to the Garden of Heaven. And all of us play a significant part in this. However, when it comes to a garden, as Dave has already mentioned, weeds can grow. Weeds can eventually destroy a garden. Weeds can grow in our heart and eventually destroy a beautiful spiritual garden. But we want to be part of God's kingdom. We want to be part of God's church. We want the church to be healthy and spiritually vibrant as a wonderful garden.

So there are some things to watch for. Some people enjoy eating squash. It's not particularly my number one fruit. But some people enjoy eating squash. And spiritually, we need to squash gossip. We need to squash criticism. We need to squash indifference.

In God's garden, we need to plant. In rows, God's number seven. In God's garden, we need to plant seven rows. Seven rows of P's. And here they are. Prayer, promptness, perseverance, politeness, preparedness, purity, and patience. Then we need seven heads of lettuce. Let us be unselfish. Let us be loyal. Let us be faithful in all aspects of life. Let us read and learn and grow in the scriptures. And let's not be weary in doing good things. Weary in well doing. Let's be obedient in all matters. Let's be truthful and always, as God loves us, let us love one another. And no garden is complete without turnips. Turn up and worship with our brothers and sisters in the Lord. Turn up with an attitude of spiritual growth.

And to remember that planting our spiritual garden will help us grow in grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. And as the Garden of Eden was beautiful, may we continue to plant our spiritual garden with love and joy and peace and patience and kindness and goodness and faithfulness and gentleness and self-control. And always be ready to feed our garden. And as a garden needs to grow, we need to grow spiritually, abundantly. Listen to these words by Peter. But grow, grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and forever. Amen. So prayers that were spoken 2,000 years ago, 5,000 years ago, maybe 100,000 years ago, are as relevant today as back then.

And Peter and all the other apostles and all those who write scriptures are always talking about past, present, and future. And we're part of all of it. But grow, grow that garden, grow that knowledge, grow that grace forever. And the Colossians, it says, "Live a life worthy of the Lord. Please him in every way, bearing spiritual fruit in every good work, growing, always growing in the knowledge of God." And then Paul writes in Thessalonians, "We ought always to thank God for all of you, brothers and sisters, and rightly so, because your faith is growing more and more, and the love all of you have are shared with one another." Remember when you first started out as a believer, as a Christian, and there's just so much to know. But growth comes.

And for many of us who have been Christians for many, many, many years, we're still learning. I particularly feel like I'm in kindergarten when it comes to spiritual things. But I'd like to move on in public school spiritually, high school spiritually, university spiritually. I want to know more. I want to grow more. I want to be part of it. I want to know who God is. I want to know who Jesus is. I want to know who the Holy Spirit is. I want to know why those scriptures were written and why it's been preserved for so many years and that we can benefit from it. It's all because of the garden. He starts in a garden. We're planting our spiritual garden. One day there will be a heavenly garden. We ought always to thank God for you, brothers and sisters, because your faith is growing more and more. Then this passage in Ephesians, "From him the whole body joined and held together by every supporting ligament grows and builds itself up in love as each part does its work."

If you're here today and you think, "I can't really help. I can't really help this church. I don't know what more I can do to help this church." So it's simple. You're here. That's enough. We're just happy to have you here. No matter what situation you're going through, no matter what difficulties, no matter what challenges, no matter what trauma. On the other side of that, with joy and love and peace and patience and goodness, it's this garden. It begins in a garden. We're part of all of this. It says, "For him the whole body," meaning the church, "joined and held together by every supporting ligament grows and builds itself up in love," listen, "as each one of us does our work, as each part does its work." That's us. So in Colossians, again, Paul says, "Just as you received, Jesus Christ as Lord, continue to live in him." Then he says, "Routed, make that garden strong. Built up in him. Let it grow. Strengthened in the faith as you were taught and overflowing with thankfulness."

Dear people who just have a gift of creating a garden, Barb is one, many other people are, they just know how to make a garden. I was not given that ability, and I'm glad. Not because I lack work, but because it's nice to see the beauty and the majesty and the ability that people have. It's true spiritually. Our spiritual garden, as we remember, is that God is the gardener. His divine power, Scripture says, has given us everything we need for life, for godliness, through our knowledge of him, and we continue to grow to know him, who's called each one of us, we're part of the garden, who's called each one of us

and given us his very great and precious promises, so that through those promises we can participate, listen to this, that we can all participate in the divine nature of God. We're part of it. We're walking away from it. We are part of it. So for this very reason, familiar passage, make every effort to add to your faith goodness, and to add to your goodness knowledge, and to add to knowledge self-control, and to add self-control to perseverance, and to perseverance godliness, brotherly, sisterly kindness, and of course, love. It says if you do these things, you will receive a rich welcome into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

I am not a gardener. I'm always impressed by gardens. And won't it be wonderful that one day, even whether you've planted a garden or not, won't it be wonderful? And I believe it to be true that one day we're going to go for a walk in God's garden. We're going to walk with our loved ones who are already with God, and we'll walk with them in that garden, a new heaven and a new earth where the garden grows and water flows and love is all about. Amen.

Closing Prayer

Let us pray.

God forgive us when we are reluctant to sacrifice ourselves to do your will. May we submit ourselves to you this week and follow the guidance that is found in your word. In Jesus' name, amen.

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