

July 1, 2020

Two Gardens

Jeremiah 29:5-6

"Build houses and settle down; plant gardens and eat what they produce. Marry and have sons and daughters; find wives for your sons and give your daughters in marriage, so that they too may have sons and daughters. Increase in number there; do not decrease.

In the seal of the city of Chicago is the phrase, *Urbs in Horto*, a city of gardens. Chicago boasts beautiful garden and at the same time horrific slums. The history of salvation is two gardens. The first in *Genesis* is where Adam and Eve lived in tranquility and the image of God. The second garden moans for the second coming of Christ. Thanks to the work of the Spirit, God is restoring the fruitfulness of the garden through the redeeming blood of Christ. We hear the familiar words of "I Come to the Garden" and realize we are Christ's own. During this pandemic may the Spirit lead to a garden filled with peace.

Prayer: Lord, thank for the garden that remind us of your love and grace. Amen.

July 2, 2020

God's Will

Ephesians 3:20-21

Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen.

When a child is baptized, do you think about who they are and what they will become? We fantasize about what we want to be when we grow up. In the midst of life we experience God's free will while living in God's world. What is God's will in my life? Later this month we will view the baptism of our great grandson, Jensen. I will have the honor of holding him and splashing the water on his forehead as we hear "I baptize you in the name of. . ." May heart will rest easy as he become God's child. Jesus yielded! I yield to God's grace. How about you?

Prayer: Jesus, you prayed God's will be done. We pray that it may be done through us. Amen.

July 3, 2020

Offering

Romans 6:10

The death he died, he died to sin once for all; but the life he lives, he lives to God.

The recent news reports of young girls being held hostage in a house in Cleveland for more than a decade makes us wonder. We are anything but perfect. Jesus is the Author and Perfecter of faith. He is both the Lamb offered for our sins and the High Priest officiating. He completed His work to save and free us from ourselves and the bondage to sin. How thankful! He freed us and we also live to God.

Prayer: Jesus, we pray that you hear our offering of gratitude in our hearts. Amen.

July 4, 2020

Treasure

Matthew 6:21

Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

In *The Glass Menagerie* Tennessee Williams casts Laura in the role of a retiring, shy young woman who escapes from reality by listening to the phonograph and playing with her collection of glass figures. We dabble in the same occupation with idols. Our treasures are often created from ourselves and imagination. As Jesus says, "Where are treasure is. .also." As we deal with the looting and burning to mourn death, can we really treasure the life of loved one via destruction and detriment to others. Where is the treasure in the life of the fallen? The 4th of July rekindles may memories. Let God be God of this nation and our treasure will be much more than our preoccupation with materials idols we conjure up and worship.

Prayer: Lord, send us the Spirit that we may grow in grace and knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

July 5, 2020

Changeless

Malachi 3:6

I the Lord do not change.

Look at your baby picture! Look into the mirror! What a change! As the world fashions us via interaction and growth, we stand in awe that the Lord is changeless. Change and decay haunt us. God's changeless nature fascinates us. How can God love me when I can't love myself? How can God forgive me when I can't forgive myself? The Bible promises that God is the "same yesterday, today and tomorrow." The unchanging Gospel beckons us.

Prayer: Lord, keep us in your saving grace. Amen.

July 6, 2020

Credited

Philippians 3:9

I want to be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ—the righteousness that comes from God on the basis of faith.

Leo Tolstoy renounced his faith and turned to wrap himself in the garment of philosophy. In this garment your whole nature is naked. Unless we dress in the robe of righteousness and be found in him, we are lost. Jesus earned the perfect righteousness for us and credited us in His salvation. In the midst of our present situation are we looking for salvation in the wrong places? In Christ our credit line is endless as the blood of Jesus wraps us in God's love and protects us from the coldness of sin and death. What a priceless credit.

Prayer: Jesus, clothe us in the robes of righteousness and credit us with faith. Amen.

July 7, 2020

Ready

Matthew 24:17-18

Let no one on the housetop go down to take anything out of the house. Let no one in the field go back to get their cloak.

The firefighter responded to the alarm immediately. He dropped everything to answer the call and the hand held extinguisher exploded in his hand. He was unprepared for the outcome. Are you prepared the Second Coming? Israel was prepared to depart from Egypt with sandals on their feet and staff in hand.

Readiness means focusing with our hearts and minds on Jesus. Faith and forgiveness prepare us for the day as well as His Second Coming. Ready or not! Here I come!

Prayer: Lord, keep us prepared and alert for your Second Coming. Amen.

July 8, 2020 Repay 1 Peter 3:9

Do not repay evil with evil or insult with insult, but with blessing.

The scientific theory is that for every action there is an opposite and equal reaction. The principle can be applied to daily life. As Christians we are called to repay evil with good, not evil with evil. When will we learn that two wrong don't make a right? We are not called to moralize behavior but to flavor it with the spirit of Christ. Christ died once for all the righteous for the unrighteous. This formula put to death the evil while making the relationship alive in Christ Jesus. By His wounds we are healed. Next time repay insults with blessings and sense the atmosphere around you.

Prayer: Lord, make us like yourself by repaying evil with good. Amen!

July 9, 2020 My Life John 10:11

The good shepherd lays down His life for the sheep.

How strangely wonderful and inspiring is the fact that Jesus willingly laid down his life for us. During the Revolutionary War Nathan Hale accepted the role of spy and was caught and sentenced to hang. His dying words were: "My only regret is that I have but one life to give for my country." Jesus' willingness to die for us enables us to live our lives to the glory of God. We may only have one life to live but we have our entire life to live and give to the service of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Prayer: Lord, open up opportunities for us live our faith and change lives for your sake. Amen.

July 10, 2020 Boundaries 1 John 3:4, 8

Everyone who sins breaks the law. .The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the devil's work.

Boundaries are vital in regard to the preservation or the destruction of relationship between God and man and man and man. Prior to the Revolutionary War the dispute over the boundary between Maryland and Pennsylvania was settle by two surveyors: Charles Mason and Jeremiah Dixon. They drew a straight line 312 miles long marking every mile with a limestone pillar. The Mason-Dixon Line soon separated the North from the South. Jesus breaks down the boundaries created by sin and reconcile us to each other by destroying the devil's work. Jesus erased the boundaries between us. How can we erase the line between ethnic groups?

Prayer: Lord, keep us from transgressing and love the boundaries of love between us and God and each other. Amen.

July 11, 2020

Sacrifices

Romans 12:1

I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God - this is your spiritual act of worship.

Sacrifices are necessities for the human race to not only continue but to flourish. A sacrifice bunt in baseball can prove to be the ingredient that wins the ball game. Sacrifices by members often stir the hearts and spirits of their colleagues to jump on the bandwagon. Isaiah speaks of the "suffering servant" who will come and die for the sake of others. Here Paul urges us to present our bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God. These sacrifices are worship and praise the name of Jesus. And the benefits are out of sight.

Prayer: Lord, give us the strength in faith to serve you as spiritual sacrifices of worship. Amen.

July 12, 2020

Reverence

Psalm 92:14

The righteous will still bear fruit in old age, they will stay fresh and green.

Do you ever look at the grey hairs in the congregation and thank God for them? Did they receive their badges of grey honor by walking the extra mile for their

brothers and sisters? Did they share their coats with the cold? Did they exchange evil for good? We cannot only guess when we see "grey haired saints/sinners" in our midst. Here we kneel in reverence for their actions and words blessed by the Lord and are encouraged to "bear fruit in old age" and at any age. That way we stay fresh and green! God doesn't have a retirement plan on earth, only in heaven.

Prayer: Dear Father, we give you thanks for the gift of old age and the ones who gone before us. Amen.

July 13, 2020 Home 2 Corinthians 5:1

Now we know that if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God, an eternal house in heaven, not built by human hands

When John Quincy Adams was 81 someone asked him how he was. Adams responded, "John Quincy Adam is quite well, thank you! But the house in which he lives is becoming a bit dilapidated." When we are in the prime of life, we seem invincible! When we reach our 60s, we realize that our house is becoming a bit dilapidated. Is yours becoming this way or already there? Then remember that God is building an eternal house in heaven, not built by human hands for us. For we are but strangers here, heaven is our home. Live today and look forward.

Prayer: Lord, we thank you for building our eternal house in heaven while we live out our earthly existence. Amen.

July 14, 2020 Woe Matthew 18:7

Woe to the world because of the things that cause people to sin.

The devil is the source of temptation. He is like the snake in the grass. We cannot see him as he slithers away. Further, Jesus teaches that temptations come from the world. Moral standards are low and going lower. Do we travel into lower spheres when hurt instead of heeding and acknowledging that the "Woe!" is correct! Stop before you exceed the worst. While serving in one parish, a member was imprisoned because he stole from his company. We worked with him and told him about the "Woes!" ahead but he continued with more and more stealing. "Woe" means stop and quit horsing around with your life.

Prayer: Lord, send your Spirit and give us strength to overcome all temptations. Keep the "woes" in front of us. Amen.

July 15, 2020 Thankful 2 Corinthians 1:3

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort.

Alfred Hitchcock's daughter wrote this tribute for his funeral: "He took me to church regularly until I could drive. Then I'd drive him to church regularly. It's because of his diligence that my religion is so strong today." We learn both compassion and comfort from the Heavenly Father. In time of distress and in times of celebration along with everything in between we are thankful for our fathers for they showed us love as our spiritual guides.

Prayer: Lord, thank you for the goodness flowing through our fathers to us and passed on today. Amen.

July 16, 2020 Pure Heart 1 Timothy 1:5

The goal of this command is to love, which comes from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith.

July is filled with family celebrations. How thankful am I for my wife as we celebrate her birthday and our anniversary along with the birthday of this nation and fourth, the birthday of our great grandson, Jensen. "Remember the Sabbath Day and keep it holy!" comes to mind. With the remembrance of God's love and grace in our lives, we are thankful. The goal of this command is to love. Love comes from God who first loved us and then comes from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith. Thanks Heavenly Dad!

Prayer: Lord, thanks for the faith of our fathers living still and loving without reservation. Amen.

July 17, 2020 Power Hebrews 4:12

The Word of God is living and active.

In grade school we learned about active and passive verbs. Active verbs reflected power and dynamics. Passive verbs rested in the inactivity of human life. Augustine around 375 AD was a student in Carthage and living in all the sins of the time. The Word of God moved him actively to embrace Jesus as Lord and Savior. Augustine was baptized and actively lived out his life purged from his sins and enlightened by the Word of God. The Lord spiritually performed a heart transplant in order to inspire him to a living and active life in Christ Jesus. May the Spirit move in and through you.

Prayer: Holy Spirit, open our hearts to the life-giving Word of God and draw us closer to Jesus. Amen.

July 18, 2020

Yes!

John 5:35

John was a lamp that burned and gave light, and you chose for a time to enjoy the light.

Here Jesus points to John the Baptist as the "Yes!" in bearing the light of God to the people. Jesus goes on in these verses to be the ultimate "Yes!" from God. Jesus lacked credentials at this time in ministry and opened the minds of the people to the role of the Messiah. God's "Yes!" lives among us full of grace and truth. God's "Yes!" lives among us through the Word and the Sacraments. He enlightens us and we enjoy the light of life. Jesus speaks God's "Yes!" today through the gifts of the cross: forgiveness, peace and eternal life. "Yes!" and more.

Prayer: Spirit, move us to accept the Word of God in our midst and hear God's "Yes!" Amen.

July 19, 2020

Leadership

Luke 22:32

But I have prayed for you, that your faith should not fail, and when you have returned to me, strengthen your brethren.

Jesus knew that Peter's three denials were going to be the backbone of his faith and the part of the mentoring process for his leadership. Often, the best teachers are ones who have been there and failed and use the failure as a stepping stone. The physical and spiritual scars of life didn't haunt Peter after Jesus forgave him

three times but propelled him to greater leadership and inspired the Pentecost sermon that converted more than 5000 souls. Peter was called to use this failure to strengthen his brethren. How can your failures strengthen you? How can it strengthen others via your story?

Prayer: Spirit, hear our confession of sins and forgive us as you prepare us to use our gifts to glorify the Lord. Amen

July 20, 2020

Vision

John 9:11

The man they called Jesus. .told me to go to Siloam and wash. So I went and washed, and then I could see.

Recently, a five star safety from Georgia met with the media to explain why he chose Ohio State to play football. He told the media that the Lord told him to enroll at Ohio State three days before signing day. The blind man heeded Jesus' instruction and did exactly what he was told. His inner vision turned to physical eyesight and he became a strong testimony for the Lord. From the mud plaster to sight! The gift of sight was second only to the gift of insight in Christ Jesus via his new vision. How well is your sight and insight today?

Prayer: Lord, give us a clear vision of faith along with sight and insight. Amen.

July 21, 2020

Hosanna!

Matthew 21:15

But when the chief priests and the teachers of the law saw the wonderful things he did and the children shouting in the temple courts, "Hosanna to the Son of David," they were indignant.

The story of a young boy attending worship for the first time is humorous and thought provoking. He sat next to his niece. When the usher collected the offering, he asked his niece what they were called. She said, "Hushers! They keep kids like you and I quiet. The children shouted in the temple courts praise to Jesus. Even the chief priests and teachers of the law could not "Hush" their praises. "Hosanna!" means "Save us, now!" Have you been "Hushers" too long? Please Lord hear our prayers and raise us up in praise.

Prayer: Lord, we praise you for you are the Messiah and the Son of David. Amen.

July 22, 2020

Watershed

John 9:38

Then, the man said, "Lord, I believe," and he worshipped Jesus.

High up in the Rocky Mountains is the continental divide. This is the watershed slopes. Precipitation cascades down the mountains to either the east or west. Coming to faith in Christ Jesus is important. This spiritual watershed slopes toward faith in Christ or away. The blind man was healed but believed. We have a decision to follow Jesus or not. During confirmation I remember sincerely confessing "Lord, I believe!" and have followed him since. The ocean of God's grace has been splashed on me. Thank you for this watershed!

Prayer: Lord, keep me strong in faith and love for you and your Gospel. Amen.

July 23, 2020

Blossoms

Isaiah 35:1

The desert and the parched land will be glad; and the wilderness will rejoice and blossom.

Blossoms catch our eyes! Especially, the blossom in the tundra of Alaska! These plants take decades to find the strength and culture to blossom. Israel was lost in captivity and without hope. Here the prophet encourages them to see the possibilities and rejoice. For Christ called the Rose of Sharon. Although allergic to rose, this inviting flower stands with beauty in our midst. Out of the parched land we live in thrives plants that blossom. When we are meandering through this parched land, may we see the blossoms and rejoice.

Prayer: Spirit, inspire us to live with the blossoms of our spiritual life in our minds. Amen.

July 24, 2020

Resurrection

Luke 20:27

Some of the Sadducees, who say there is no resurrection, came to Jesus with a question.

The Sadducees didn't believe in resurrection and the Pharisees did. Their debate heightened the dynamics and interaction with Jesus. During his last visit to Jerusalem after Jesus silenced the Pharisees, these great teachers hoped to silence Jesus with a question regarding marriage in the afterlife. Jesus saw through their question and opened their minds to the importance of the resurrection. In the resurrection we dwell in the presence of God. Beyond the grave is real life and our Father's house with "many rooms." How much does our nation need a "resurrection hope?"

Prayer: Lord, give us faith and ammunition to silence your enemies. Amen.

July 25, 2020 Sign John 2:11

What Jesus did here in Cana of Galilee was the first of the signs through which he revealed his glory; and his disciples believed in him.

Signs surround us to prevent accidents and to send us in the right direction. Road signs at times can be confusing. Jesus' first sign of changing water into wine at the wedding of Cana of Galilee influenced his disciples. The six stone jars contain water and changed into the best wine. Jesus changes our lives into the best wine as we indulge in his grace. The chief steward was amazed but didn't see the sign of the Messiah in his midst. We toast the first sign of Jesus and embrace him as Lord and Savior.

Prayer: Lord, send your Spirit so that we see the signs and head in the right direction. Amen.

July 26, 2020 Lesson Matthew 12:40

For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of a huge fish, so the Son of Man will be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.

We draw lessons from the past that translate into new life in the present. Jesus draws the lesson from Jonah to teach his disciples a lesson about his death and resurrection. The "sign of Jonah" was vividly present in Jesus' day. Jesus points to the Jonah story to vividly show that he must suffer and die and rise again on the third day. What is death like? How did Jonah survive the acids in the fish's

system and survive? How did he survive the lack of light? How did Jesus overcome death? Belly up and believe.

Prayer: Lord, teach us this lesson again and again as we attempt to sense your salvation unto eternal life. Amen.

July 27, 2020

Thirsty

Revelation 22:17

The Spirit and the bride say, "Come!" And let the one who hears say, "Come!" Let the one who is thirsty come; and let the one who wishes take the free gift of the water of life.

When we first moved to Las Vegas from Nebraska, we kept asking why so many people walked around with water bottles. The first summer answered the question. The "dry heat" caused perspiration and instant evaporation. Dehydration was not only possible but probable. The same scenario happens here in Arizona and when our spiritual life dries up. The "water of life" is an invitation to the spiritually thirsty to receive the free gift by hearing the words and sharing in the Supper. "Come!" "Come and drink!" You are invited to quench your thirst on the "living water."

Prayer: Lord, we thank you for opening the fountain flowing with living water- the Word of Christ. Amen.

July 28, 2020

Before

Psalms 90:2

Before the mountains were born or you brought forth the whole world, from everlasting to everlasting you are God.

"Before" is an interesting word. By the grace of God and Gerry's patience we have been married more than 51 years. I can hardly remember "BG!" - Before Gerry. The psalmist looks at the mountains and only imagines the ages prior to their existence. Mountains are mentioned many times in the Bible. Mountains lift our thoughts up to the Lord and enable us to remember our time on earth is only a small grain in the sands of time. What was "before" is before and we cannot only thank the Lord for the "before" before we arrived.

Prayer: Lord, we thank you for the mountains and we pray for mountaintop experience. Amen.

July 29, 2020

Landscape

Psalm 104:16

The trees of the LORD are well watered, the cedars of Lebanon that he planted.

My best friend in high school was blessed with a son who is an incredible landscape designer. He has designed many landscapes in many prominent neighbors. Pictures don't do justice to his works. The psalmist mentioned the cedars of Lebanon because of their prized scented wood used for temples and royal palaces. King Solomon's palace was called "The House of the Forest of Lebanon." God is the great landscaper and His imagination far exceeds our designs. As we journey across these United States, we can easily be awed by God's landscape design. Take time to behold the glory of the Lord's landscape.

Prayer: Lord, we thank you for your wonderful work, especially, giving your Son to give us new life. Amen.

July 30, 2020

Discovery

John 1:45

Philip found Nathanael and told him, "We have found the one Moses wrote about in the Law, and about whom the prophets also wrote—Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph."

The Discovery Channel affords us opportunity to look at part of the world and nature that we would not see even if we were looking. Philip points out Jesus to Nathanael. He shares his discovery with this man looking for Israel's Messiah. The discovery allows Nathanael the thrill of joining Jesus on a three year ministry journey. The promised deliverer was in their midst but Nathanael needed someone to point him out. Take time to point Jesus out to a friend.

Prayer: Lord, we thank you for our family and friends who point you out to others. Amen.

July 31, 2020

Perseverance

James 1:4

Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.

Perseverance is like the old blacksmiths forging their kilns with fuel to heat the metal to the highest degree to create a very special work that would endure centuries. Anything short of the best is less. Here we are encouraged as mothers and daughters of the Lord to finish the work so that maturity moves our family to completeness. Sometimes our greatest want is to give them everything and more than we had. The Word states that if we want them to lack nothing, then they are to pass through the fire and know "heat" and "forge" and then "hope." Don't keep them from the fires but teach them to use the fires and their faith.

Prayer: Lord, forge us in the fire of life so that we may persevere and not lack anything. Amen.