

With God in the Garden

Read Matthew Ch 26 v36-46

We are lucky in this country as most of our large cities have gardens in which to stroll and take shade if necessary. London is especially rich in this respect. Not so in Jerusalem, as there was not much space in this city crowded on a hillside. There cannot, however, be two more contrasting gardens than the two we think about at Easter – The Garden of Gethsemane and the Easter Garden where Jesus' body was laid in a new tomb after his crucifixion.

Jesus and his disciples knew the Garden of Gethsemane well. They often met there enjoying quiet moments together and perhaps picnicking in the shade under the ancient, bent and twisted olive trees. It was more of a walled orchard. We can just imagine the disciples sitting down with their backs against the gnarled tree trunks, wrapping their cloaks round them and after a time falling asleep while Jesus went on ahead to pray. He was troubled. He knew what lay ahead and asks God if there is any alternative. Does it have to happen this way? Yet in the face of all his pain he says "Yet not as I will, but as you will". Jesus freely agrees to his fate after a long struggle and allows God's superior knowledge of the situation to lead him forward. Despite his agony and pain Jesus says "Yes" and in that word alone there is hope. Even though Jesus returns twice to find his closest friends have deserted him and fallen asleep he faces the hours ahead with calm acceptance.

Read John Ch 19 v41, 42 and John Ch 20 v 1-18

I am not an early riser so I would never have been first at the tomb but Mary obviously was. She arrived at the beginning of a new day – a new era – a new creation - and a new heaven and earth. (To continue our Bible Garden theme). Many say this is the best time of the day. Mary would also agree with this, for although she started in grief and despair before long she was consumed with happiness. Jesus' body has gone. The two disciples have gone to tell others and Mary is alone in the garden. She doesn't recognise Jesus at first but when he calls her by name she immediately responds. Jesus calls to her in love and she holds her arms out to him. Jesus tells her not to hold on to him, not because he doesn't want to hug her but because he knows he is physically no longer with her. Their relationship has to move on and grow in a different way from now on. Mary and the other disciples have to continue doing what Jesus told them to do but in a more independent way. None of us can go back in time and the faith that the first disciple had to learn is the faith by which we live today. The joy of that first Easter morning has been passed down to us and must be passed even further. We can still meet with our master gardener and can encourage others to do the same.

For Discussion

1. In our times of pain do we ever ask God the same questions as Jesus asked in the Garden of Gethsemane?
2. Mary said "Yes" when approached by the angel and Jesus said "Yes". Do we find it easy to say "Yes"?
3. Do you find it difficult to let go of the past and move forward?
4. What is your church doing about trying to move forward?