

**Holy Trinity Lutheran Church
Des Moines, WA
April 6, 2014**

Revelation 22:1-6

The Garden of Paradise

- 1. The beginning**
- 2. The End**
- 3. Look to this Garden**

**Hymns: 127 – A Purple Robe
Distribution: 107 – 387
Closing: 114 (vv.3,4)**

All Scripture quotations from NIV 1984

¹ Then 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 ² down 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. ³ No longer will there be any curse. The throne of God and of the Lamb will be in the city, and his servants will serve him. ⁴ They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads. ⁵ There will be no more night. They will not need the light of a lamp or the light of the sun, for the Lord God will give them light. And they will reign for ever and ever. ⁶ The angel said to me, "These words are trustworthy and true. The Lord, the God of the spirits of the prophets, sent his angel to show his servants the things that must soon take place."

It was four Sundays ago, but do you remember where we started this Lenten journey? It was back at the very beginning of the world, back in Genesis, back in a Garden of Perfection. But that garden had been wrecked. It was wrecked by the devil's cunning; it was wrecked by Adam and Eve's disobedience; it was wrecked by sin. And as a result of what happened in that garden, it would now be closed. The final view that mankind had of that garden of what was once Paradise was an angel of God

standing at its entrance with a fiery sword keeping them away. Yet, despite the ugliness of what happened in that garden, it was a garden that would not soon be forgotten; it was a garden that should not be forgotten; it was a garden that could not be forgotten.

God wanted Adam and Eve to remember what happened in that garden. He wanted them to use the tragic events that happened in that garden to tell their children why life was hard and full of struggles; he wanted them to explain why there was hostility and anger and jealousy that burned in their hearts; he wanted them to know why there was immorality and filth all around. It was because of the sin that entered into the world, in that garden.

But God didn't just want Adam and Eve to remember that garden and think only of sin and Satan and the fall. He also wanted Adam and Eve to remember what perfection was like. He wanted them to tell their children and their grandchildren and their children after them what it was like to walk and talk with God with no fear or guilt or shame. He wanted them to tell them what it was like to have perfect peace with one another. God wanted Adam and Eve and every person after them to hope for a return to a place like this, a place of perfect paradise.

So, as he escorted them out of that garden which they could no longer have, and into a world that was infected by sin, he also gave them a promise. That promise has been our focus throughout the Sundays of this Lenten season. As mankind is given constant reminders of the sinfulness that fills their own lives and is also sinfulness all around them, God in his mercy, throughout the history of the world, has also given continual reminders of the promise that came in that garden; the answer that he would provide for that sin. That is what the Bible is, it is the message of God keeping his promise, given in that garden, a promise that there would be forgiveness; that there would be life; that there would even be restoration of perfection.

So, how fitting; that God's Word, which first came to mankind in a garden where perfection had been destroyed ends with a promise from God of a Garden of Perfect Paradise? Speaking through the Apostle John in the last chapter of the Bible, God gives his people this last

promising picture to hold onto, *“Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, as clear as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb² down 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.³ No longer will there be any curse. The throne of God and of the Lamb will be in the city, and his servants will serve him.⁴ They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads.⁵ There will be no more night. They will not need the light of a lamp or the light of the sun, for the Lord God will give them light. And they will reign for ever and ever.⁶ The angel said to me, “These words are trustworthy and true. The Lord, the God of the spirits of the prophets, sent his angel to show his servants the things that must soon take place.”*

What God promises to mankind in those verses, is what God wanted mankind to have from the very beginning: Life eternal in the Garden of Paradise. In those words, we get a picture of what life was supposed to be, **but is not**, because of our sins. In those words, we get a picture of what life will be, because of what Jesus has done with our sins. And so today, on this last Sunday before we enter Holy Week, God has us focus for a few moments this morning, not on the pain and the suffering, but on the glory. So, using John’s words, let us walk through this Garden of Paradise this morning, simply observing what God has as the goal through all that we are about to see next week.

Though in many ways, the Garden of Paradise described in Revelation will be similar to the Garden of Eden created in the beginning; through John’s vision we see a Garden that also stands in contrast to Eden in three clear ways. Those three differences are crucially important, because they ensure that what happened in Eden – when Paradise and perfection was lost – cannot and will not happen in this Garden of Paradise.

Whereas the Garden of Eden is forever marked by the curse of death that came after the fall into sin, the garden described in Revelation is marked by this feature, *“No longer will there be any curse.”* The curse of death that came from disobedience; the curse of death that causes

so much pain and loss; the curse of death which affects every one of us will be gone.

And it will forever be that way because in this garden there is no more night either. So often in the Bible, especially in Jesus’ preaching, we hear of night and darkness as the companion of evil and sin. So when God tells us that there is no night, he also promises that there is no evil. In the Garden of Eden stood the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil; that tree stood as Adam and Eve’s opportunity to serve and obey and honor God. Yet, ultimately it served as Satan’s tool of evil. How assuring then, that in the final Garden of Paradise, as we live in eternity, there will be no serpent or his cunning; there will be no deeds of darkness; there will not even be the possibility of temptation. In this Garden of Paradise, we see a place that is, and will remain, perfect forever.

The second feature that stands out as we view this garden is the fact that we are allowed inside! When Adam and Eve left, God closed Eden and ensured that no one would ever enter that garden again. It was a place that God would not even allow people to see. But the Garden of Paradise promised in Revelation is open. It has been opened by the Lamb and the work that he did. When Jesus shed his blood on the cross, paradise became accessible once again. Christ paid the price of admission, he opened the gates.

Who can enter in? Those who have Jesus’ name on their foreheads have the right to enter. For those who know Jesus – and his life and death and resurrection; for those who believe in the work that he accomplished; for those who hold onto their faith throughout the struggles and temptations of earthly life; Jesus gives a promise in Revelation 3:12, *“He who overcomes I will make a pillar in the temple of my God. Never again will he leave it. I will write on him the name of my God and the name of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem, which is coming down out of heaven from my God; and I will also write on him my new name.”* That name, written in Jesus’ blood, guarantees that we have access into this Paradise.

Finally, this Garden is different because in it we find what was lost in Eden: everything that is there inside points to life. We will drink from the River of the Water of Life as it flows from God’s throne. We will eat and find sustenance

from the eternal Tree of Life, bearing its perfect and eternal fruit for believers. We will live in the Light provided by God himself as he sits on his throne before us and reigns forever and ever. Life and light in a Garden of Paradise for people who once only knew death and darkness that came out of a Garden of Perfection lost.

What a show of God's love that this Garden of Paradise is God's final picture for us. When he closed the Words of Scripture, he wanted this picture to be in our minds. This is what he wanted us to see and hold to.

Yet we know how diligently and deceitfully Satan will work to have us lose sight of that Paradise promised by God. Until we have entered through those gates, he will continue to attack. For some, he will use struggles/hardships to stir up doubt that such a perfect paradise could even be possible. For some, he will use earthly pleasures and paradises to have us lose sight of eternal paradise in heaven. For some, he will use the guilt and shame of continued sin to have us question whether we could really be allowed into this perfect paradise. Every day, may be seen in all these ways and more, Satan will come after this picture that God has given to you.

So, use this promise of the Garden of Paradise, hold onto the beautiful future of perfection and life that God gives to you. Use it in the week ahead, as you see the suffering and pain of Jesus at their worst. Use it when Satan brings struggles and pain of your own into life. Use it whenever Satan tries to destroy Paradise for you. Hold to God's picture of Paradise and be assured by these words from the angel of God, ***"These words are trustworthy and true."*** What God promised in the Garden of Eden; what God protected through the history of the world; what God carried out on the cross; he will bring to completion, when you stand before him in the Garden of Paradise. Amen.