

Pentecost 16 – September 8, 2013

Text: Luke 14:25-35

Theme: "Hey! Where's the Garden?"

**"In the Garden" is a beloved funeral hymn. I don't know why, but it is. I think because it is very sentimental and sweet. When one is grieving the loss of someone, it seems as though some think that sweet sentiment is helpful. Perhaps that is true for some, but not for me. When I am grieving, sweet and sentimental does not help. In fact, it irritates. I want to hear the powerful promises of God: that he is in control of all things, that he will turn everything for the good of those who love him and finally and most importantly, that he has already won the war against death and Satan and that we will inherit eternal life with all who have died in faith before us. That's what I need to hear to help me overcome my grief. "In the Garden" doesn't cut it.**

*I come to the garden alone*

*While the dew is still on the roses*

*And the voice I hear falling on my ear*

*The Son of God discloses.*

*And He walks with me, and He talks with me,*

*And He tells me I am His own;*

*And the joy we share as we tarry there,*

*None other has ever known.*

**Well, first off, God never makes any promise that he will speak to us in the garden. He promises to speak to us in the Holy Scriptures. Some of the worst heresies of Christianity have been created by people who say that God has spoken to them outside of Holy Scripture: David Koresh, Jim Jones, and of course Joseph Smith. If you tell me that God is speaking to you in the Garden, then I want to know why you think it is God? It could just as well be Satan, or it could be that underdone fish you ate last night. But even if he did happen to chat you up in your garden, why would you think the experience would be all pleasant and sing-songy. I don't know who the author of "In The Garden" thought he heard but it wasn't my Lord Jesus. Listen to the Sanctus as we sing it today. That is my Lord Jesus when he speaks from the throne of grace with terrifying Seraphim hovering by his throne. His speech makes us weak in the knees and wanting to flee. Look at the Gospel for today and you can hear my Lord Jesus speak.**

**"If anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple. Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after me cannot be my disciple." Well that's not very pleasant, is it? Where are the pretty roses? Where is the refreshing dew? Jesus never promised to come to our garden and to**

**be pleasant. He promised to come to our stinking, wretched dump of a life and to save us from the hell that *we* have created in *his garden*.**

**Moses laid before his people curses and blessings. Do it God's way and there are blessings. Do it your way and there are curses. There is nothing complicated about that. Moses, of course was talking about daily life, not salvation. If we want blessings in daily life, follow the 10 Commandments. But Jesus raises the stakes. The leaders of the people were teaching them that doing good works, making appropriate offerings and so forth would earn them not just blessings in this life but eternal life.**

**Jesus says, in the Gospel, this is how salvation works. Only complete faith in me will save you from Hell, death and Satan. Without me, you won't just suffer earthly curses but you will end up eternally rotting but never dying in a hideous existence which poets have called a lake of fire. But I think it is far worse than fire. I think it utter nothingness where your human brain that loves parameters and structure will have to spend eternity with no time and no space and no one else.**

**Do it your way and you go to Hell. It is as simple as that. I know it is harsh, but do you really want a flouncy, frou-frou Savior in combat against Satan for your soul? We have a Savior who makes**

**Brian Urlacher look like Tinkerbelle. We have a Savior who kicked down the gates of Hell and sacrificed everything he had, even his own soul, for us. Why do we keep trying to make him into a sissy?**

**Pick up your crosses, your burdens, your irritations from this world and follow our Savior. The journey is difficult. He never promised otherwise.**

**We are going to sing the sermon hymn in just a minute and it addresses the difficult life we lead. Pay attention to the words. Open your hymnals now to hymn 853. I want you to really look at the words we will sing in just a moment.**

**1           How clear is our vocation, Lord,  
              When once we heed Your call:  
              To live according to Your Word  
              And daily learn, refreshed, restored,  
              That You are Lord of all  
              And will not let us fall.**

**There's Moses' curses and blessings. When we heed God's call, we will be refreshed and restored and he will not let us fall. But we know that nothing in this life is that simple. Like a skein of yarn, our lives will inevitably become tangled up with sin. We encourage one another in this hymn not to forget who our God is and therefore, who we are. This journey is hard but he is able to repair any damage we do because of what he has already done on the cross.**

**2           But if, forgetful, we should find  
              Your yoke is hard to bear;  
              If worldly pressures fray the mind,**

**And love itself cannot unwind  
Its tangled skein of care:  
Our inward life repair.**

**In fact, we marvel at how our powerful God even works through our weakness. He does not make everything rosy and happy in the garden. The garden comes at the end. Right now as we make our way through this dump, he uses our heartache and trials to strengthen us for greater service to him and greater service to the kingdom.**

**3 We marvel how Your saints become  
In hindrances more sure;  
Whose joyful virtues put to shame  
The casual way we wear Your name  
And by our faults obscure  
Your pow'r to cleanse and cure.**

**4 In what You give us, Lord, to do,  
Together or alone,  
In old routines or ventures new,  
May we not cease to look to You,  
The cross You hung upon—  
All You endeavored done.**

**All he endeavored... done. There is where real comfort is found. That is why we do not hesitate to leave anyone and everyone behind who interferes in our relationship with him. We are not wishful thinkers who live in a la la land of dewy roses. We know life stinks most of the time, but we also know who will fix that. We know that his Word and Sacrament get us through the garbage dump and that a place in the real garden, his eternal garden is already awaiting us.**