

Jon's Good Friday Meditation on April 2, 2021

On the night of Jesus' betrayal, he just finished washing the disciple's feet, and gave them a new commandment to love one another.

After teaching them, Jesus took them to a **garden** across the Kidron Valley east of Jerusalem.

We believe this to be the Garden of Gethsemene according to Matthew, Mark, and Luke. Jesus often met there with his disciples.

Gardens are an important theological location in the Bible. The Garden of Eden, of course, in Genesis is where we find creation's origin story. Genesis 2-3 contained the tree of life and the tree of knowledge of good and evil.

The Garden of Eden is also the place where original sin happened when Adam and Eve disobeyed God's command not to eat the fruit from the tree of knowledge of good and evil in the middle of the garden. After God found out, they hid themselves, lied about it, blamed the serpent or each other, and were ashamed.

In John's Passion Narrative, garden scenes are mentioned 4 times. This is significant. Jesus is arrested in the garden of Gethsemene. He is crucified in a garden. John 19:41 says there was a garden in the place Jesus was crucified. Jesus is buried in a garden tomb. And Mary mistakes Jesus as a gardener on Easter morning.

What is up with all this garden imagery in John? Something new is happening in the passion of John to redeem what happened in the Garden of Eden.

In Romans 5, the apostle Paul says, "sin came into the world through one man" Adam. "But the free gift is not like the trespass. For if the many died through the one man's trespass, much more surely have the grace of God and the free gift in the grace of one man Jesus Christ, abounded for the many." Therefore just as one man's trespass led to condemnation for all, so one man's act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all."

Jesus' act of righteousness, his passion, put us in a right relationship with God. It was a free gift. Jesus died for our salvation and the

salvation of the world. Through the cross God was saving the world. God battled evil and the powers of this world and won. That is why we call this day Good Friday.

But we can't forget the human side of Jesus' passion... all the pain and suffering he experienced. Jesus was betrayed by Judas, denied by Peter, abandoned by his disciples, falsely accused by Jewish leaders, flogged, sentenced to death, mocked, and put on a cross. Jesus last words from the cross were, "It is finished." Then he bowed his head and gave up his spirit. Jesus has completed the work God the Father has given him to do.

Based on this theme of the 4 gardens in John's Passion Gospel, I ask you, what garden moments have you had this year? Times when you felt betrayed, falsely accused, or mocked, beaten up, or deeply grieved. What are you lamenting or fearing these days? If you have paper handy, I invite you to write them down now... or keep them in your mind for a moment. Now look at the cross. Cast these thoughts on the cross.

Know that Jesus is with you. He knows your pain and suffering. He weeps with you and laments with you.

John's Gospel has one more garden scene in chapter 20. I invite you to read it on Easter Sunday.

Amen.