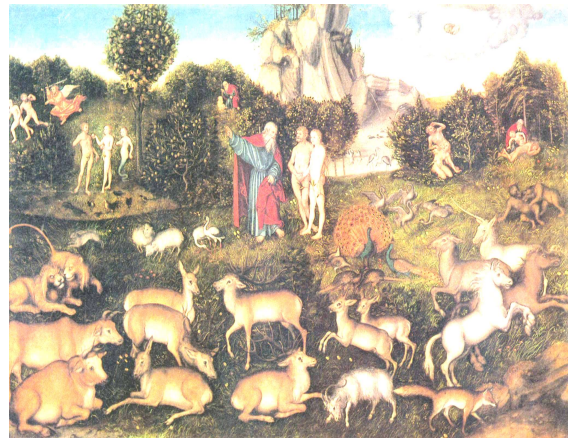


Sermon July 2023

Dear reader! Summer time is garden time. If you have a garden, you can enjoy it especially in summer. Here in the UK we have a strong gardening culture. Even a small garden is important to many people, for good reasons I am sure. For us Christians, one reason could be that the Bible speaks so often of the garden. At the beginning of the Bible, God is the first gardener, so to speak, who creates the Garden of Eden. He then entrusts this garden to us humans to tend. The image of the garden runs through the whole Bible. Images and comparisons of planting and harvesting in the Gospels follow on from this. In the Orient, a flowering garden has always been a symbol of life, of growing and flourishing, of paradisiacal conditions, simply the contrast to the barren and hostile desert. Here are seven thoughts on the garden, because seven is a biblical number in which the whole of creation is reflected.



Garden of Eden - Lucas Cranach the Elder

The first thought is: A garden is a microcosm. Someone has used the beautiful German expression "Wimmelbuch des Lebens" for this. "Wimmelbücher" are children's books with few pages, but on which, for example, a whole village is depicted with all its details: big and small, people and animals, landscape and houses. The garden is such a "Wimmelbuch" of life. Everything can be found in it: Becoming and passing away, good and bad, joy and frustration, the Garden of Eden and the Fall of Man. As humans, we cannot always see this with the naked eye. Much takes place in secret, in and under the earth, which leads us to the second thought:

The garden shows us: we are not alone! A garden is home to many living creatures, not only humans. These include plants, animals and insects. The largest number is even made up of the invisible micro-organisms, but they are very important. Without them, which populate the soil by the billions, nothing would grow. We are connected to our environment - in a double sense. We depend on each other. That is why we need an eye for the connections and the proverbial "look over the garden fence". Gardening is a universal human passion and gardening together is living together.

The attentive view of these connections also shows us that the essential things are gifts. Every gardener knows from experience: plants do not grow faster if you pull on them. We can sow and nurture, but ultimately nature has to do its part. Sun, wind and rain are God's blessing for his earthly garden. This insight can be applied to life in general: much is out of our hands there, too, and we can only be grateful recipients. Bernard of Clairvaux said: "The garden of paradise is not entered with the feet, but with the heart."

Nevertheless, a garden is also a place of creation and creativity. In the Bible, it is initially God whose ordering hand creates the Garden of Eden. But God delegates the responsibility for his garden to man "that he may cultivate it and keep it". This results in an interpretation of the biblical metaphor of the divine likeness of man: Man is in the image of God because, as a creature, he can nevertheless assume responsibility for creation just like God. Human creative power and creativity should serve to preserve the Garden of Eden.

"One of the most beautiful paths to ourselves leads through the garden." goes a saying. A beautiful garden can convey a sense of paradise - not only in desert areas. That is why gardens are places of well-being and gratitude, places where we can feel close to the Creator.

A garden can be a place of rest and recreation. This idea would fit in well as the seventh thought, because the Bible says that God rested on the seventh day. There, too, the likeness shows: as human beings, we also need rest. We need refuelling for body and soul. In an increasingly noisy world, the silence in the garden helps us to hear the quiet but essential sounds.

That is why a garden also helps "God-seekers". In the Bible, God seeks man in his garden, "Where are you Adam?" Jesus is likewise in a garden at important moments of his earthly life according to the Bible. In the Garden of Gethsemane, God ultimately struggles in Jesus to love his people, who betray and reject him. After his resurrection. Jesus appears to Mary of Magdala, who at first suspects him to be the gardener. What a parallel to the story of creation!

In the garden, the footsteps of God cross those of man. It can happen that the traces of God and the traces of the gardeners get so mixed up that it is no longer clear which are whose. And that is probably the best thing that can happen in a garden. Amen.

Yours Kai Thierbach