

With God in the Garden

Where do you feel closest to God? Is it at the kitchen sink or the office desk, in the local supermarket or the leisure centre, in your special Moravian Church or the Cathedral or Minster that you may visit on holiday? Your first answer may be in a church but on giving it more thought you may say "God is everywhere. I feel close to him everywhere". He is out in the countryside and in the back garden. Indeed many people say they feel closer to God in the garden. When the new theme was announced, two of the sisters in our Lower Wyke group immediately recited this verse:

The kiss of the sun for pardon
The song of the birds for mirth
You are nearer God's heart in a garden
Than anywhere else on earth

Indeed the closeness to nature: to open spaces, to trees, plants, flowers, shrubs, all displaying God's beauty, from the tiny daisies to the largest spreading oak, all have a positive effect on our wellbeing.

During the next 12 months we will think about the gardens and plants mentioned in the Bible and gardens today in the 21st century. In the Bible there are references to plants for healing and, of course in biblical times, people were used to working the land for food and sustenance. The first gardens were made in China about 4,000 years ago and before long every culture had adopted gardening as one of their pleasures. A garden represents Paradise on Earth, so it is our opportunity to experience a little bit of heaven here on earth. The word "paradise" comes from the Persian word for a garden. Each one of us has a different idea of heaven and so each one of us cultivates a unique garden – never quite the same as anyone else's.

Many of you may already be keen gardeners. I know of at least 3 churches that have embarked on new gardening projects of one kind or another in the last few years and are deriving much pleasure and satisfaction from working "with God in the Garden". Four or five years ago, two enterprising sisters at Lower Wyke started a monthly "Greenfingers" plant swap meeting. With help from others who prepare and serve refreshments, some who set up tables and chairs and even more who spread the word to friends and neighbours, this garden based morning is a busy time of friendship, fellowship and fun, to say nothing of the amazing transfer of botanical knowledge and expertise. You may like to start a group like this in your own congregation.

Even if your home is in the city with no chance of a garden, a window box or small herb pot still provides the opportunity to work with God to grow scented, colourful blooms or healthy, tasty leaves. No-one is exempt from creating their own Paradise on Earth.

For Discussion

1. You may like to make a list of gardens you and your members have visited and discuss the merits of each one.
2. You may like to list the plants mentioned in the Bible, note their references and discuss their uses.

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