

A Blessing on Our Homes

Gardens

Scripture Reading

The River of Life

Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb through the middle of the street of the city. On either side of the river is the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, producing its fruit each month; and the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations. Nothing accursed will be found there anymore. But the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and his servants will worship him; they will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads. And there will be no more night; they need no light of lamp or sun, for the Lord God will be their light, and they will reign forever and ever. (**Revelation 22: 1-5**)

Opening Prayer

We give thanks for the gift that is home,
We bless the one who gave us life that we might experience love
We bless the ones with whom we live and share that love.
We bless this day and watch for the blessings it holds in wait.
We bless those we know and love now in their own homes.
May we always be truly grateful and ever-loving good Lord. Amen.

Don't tell England's enthusiastic gardeners, but the patron saint of gardeners is an Irish monk Fiacre, his reputation as a gardener and herbalist became so widespread that he was inundated by people in search of his healing remedies.

In an effort to regain some solitude he left Ireland for France, where the local bishop agreed to give him some land to site a new hermitage by the River Marne. Legend tells that the offer was for as much land as he could clear in one day and that Fiacre, having commended his plans to God covered an astonishingly large area. Here he built an oratory dedicated to Our Lady and a hospice so that he could continue to provide healing care to the sick. But his hermit's cell and garden remained his refuge and place of prayer.

Over time his reputation led to being joined by followers and a monastery was established. This became a magnet for those trading in plants and its garden was one of the most famous in the whole of Europe. Of course, every monastery had a garden and herbal remedies were a stock in trade of monks and nuns alike. Indeed the reputation of Fiacre and the monastery in France is

easily matched if not outshone by the German mystic Hildegard of Bingen. Her range of knowledge and skills was much greater than Fiacre; including musical composition and counsel of church and civic leaders as well as publishing her learning about the healing properties of plants in *The Physica*.

So, gardening has a long and honourable history in Christian communities, and has always been closely associated with healing, remedies and solitude. The experience of many gardeners matches these monastic traits. If the ancient proverb “physician heal thyself” could be applied to anyone other than a doctor, gardeners could make a plausible claim although the healing involved here is largely emotional and psychological which of course is no less important than matters of physical wellbeing. In our own times community gardens such as our own a Walton offer a friendly, safe and healthy environment for people with a whole range of needs. The success comes not from the application of any complicated theory, but as a direct result of the hands on engagement with the earth, elements, wildlife and plants that make up the ecological community within which even those unaware of any need find healing.

A garden nurtures the gardener far more than the gardener nurtures the garden. By force of habit the gardener lives with anticipation. Each day’s task looks to the future with hope. The task itself might be arduous, repetitive, tedious but it contributes towards something bigger than itself. A future filled with surprises, delights, and it has to be said, the odd disappointment and set back along the way. More than most other human enterprises gardening is a partnership in which human beings flourish alongside nature rather than by manipulating nature.

This healing dimension points towards a reframing of the usual story we tell about the Garden of Eden. This imagines that the Garden of Eden represents an earlier, more blissful existence for the human species. A bliss forfeited as a direct consequence of human sinfulness. Indeed, as a story it emerged in our quest to discover the origins of human suffering and sin which are both undeniable aspects of the human experience.

The error comes in forgetting that it is a story and always has been a story. It is not and was not conceived of as history, still less as scientifically grounded.

So, what becomes of the beautiful image of humanity walking in the cool of the morning as Adam and Eve do in the Genesis story? Are we to mourn

something we've lost even though we never actually had it? Or does the Garden of Eden invite us to imagine the prospect of humanity becoming responsive to God's love to such an extent that human society and the planet become more peaceable and mirror the vision presented in the Book of Revelation.

Perhaps we shouldn't be surprised that Mary Magdalen mistook Jesus for a gardener, because his Resurrection heralds this new creation. The garden which had served as a burial ground becomes a witness to God's death defying love.

Hymn one verse simply won't do, so...

Morning has broken
Like the first morning
Blackbird has spoken
Like the first bird
Praise for the singing
Praise for the morning
Praise for them springing
Fresh from the world

Sweet the rain's new fall
Sunlit from Heaven
Like the first dewfall
On the first grass
Praise for the sweetness
Of the wet garden
Sprung in completeness
Where His feet pass

Mine is the sunlight
Mine is the morning
Born of the one light
Eden saw play
Praise with elation
Praise every morning
God's recreation
Of the new day

Songwriter: Eleanor Farjeon
Lyrics © Universal Music Publishing Group

Blessing Prayer

It seems appropriate on this occasion to turn to nature's great friend and advocate Saint Francis whose delight and appreciation flowed into that great paean of praise and blessing to God known as *The Cantic of Creation*. Weather permitting, or perhaps even if the weather is not so obliging it would be good to pray or sing this blessing outside. Out loud is fine too, your neighbours will not be surprised by anyone doing something out of the ordinary in the current circumstances.

Most High, all powerful, good Lord.
Yours are the praise, the glory and the honour
and every blessing.
To you alone, Most High, they belong
And no one is truly worthy to pronounce your name.
Be praised, my Lord, with all your creatures,
especially Sir Brother Sun,
who is day and by him you shed light upon us.
He is beautiful and radiant with great splendour,
of you, Most High, he bears the likeness.
Be praised, my Lord, through Sister Moon and the Stars,
in the heavens you formed them clear and precious and beautiful.
Be praised, my Lord, through Brother Wind
and through Air and Cloud and fair and all Weather,
by which you nourish all that you have made.
Be praised, my Lord, through Sister Water,
who is very useful and humble and precious and pure.
Be praised, my Lord, through Brother Fire,
by whom you light up the night;
he is beautiful and merry and vigorous and strong.
Be praised, my Lord, through our Sister Mother Earth,
who sustains and guides us,
and produces diverse fruits with coloured flowers and herbs.
Be praised, my Lord, by those who pardon for love of you,
and endure sickness and trials.
Blessed are they who endure them in peace,
for by you, Most High, they shall be crowned.
Be praised, my Lord, through our Sister Bodily Death,
From whom no one living can escape.
Woe to those who die in mortal sin.
Blessed are those whom she will find in your most holy will,
for the second death will do them no harm.
Praise and bless my Lord
and give him thanks and serve him with great humility.

The hymn *All Creatures of our God and King* is a version of this Cantic

Notes on Artworks



Figure 1. ***Pathway into the Garden at Giverny*** – Claude Monet

The most well-known garden in the world of art is the one developed by the Impressionist Claude Monet. This was where he found his own solace and inspiration and as beautiful as the garden is it retains an imprint of his presence not only in the house and gift shop but as you walk through its extensive layout. Despite the great number of visitors it holds on to atmosphere he created and can be consider along with his many paintings of it, a living work of art in itself.

Monet's Garden is of course most famous for its lily ponds.
Figure 2. ***Giverny Lily Pond*** – Photograph 2019

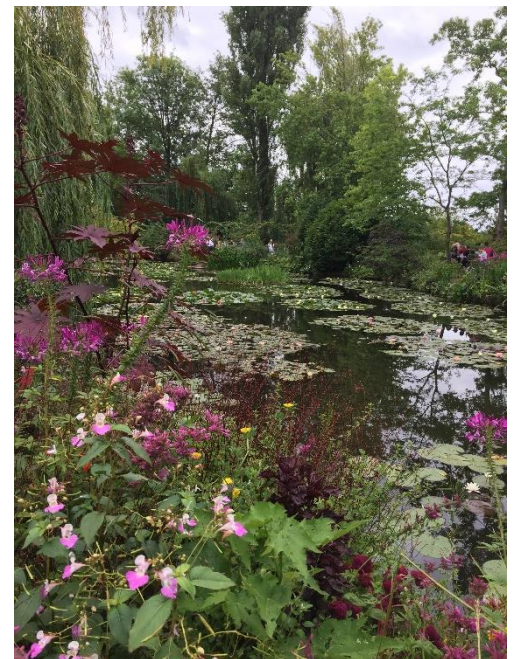


Figure 3. ***A Flemish Kitchen Garden*** – Henri De Braekeleer

For centuries the primary purpose of many gardens has been the provision of food to sustain the household. Scratched out from a plot of land around the dwelling of peasants who also had to work the land on behalf of the landowner, they developed into a thing of pride and in better times a place could be found to plant flowers to brighten the interior. Perhaps some were placed as a votive gift to an image of Our Lady in the house or local church.

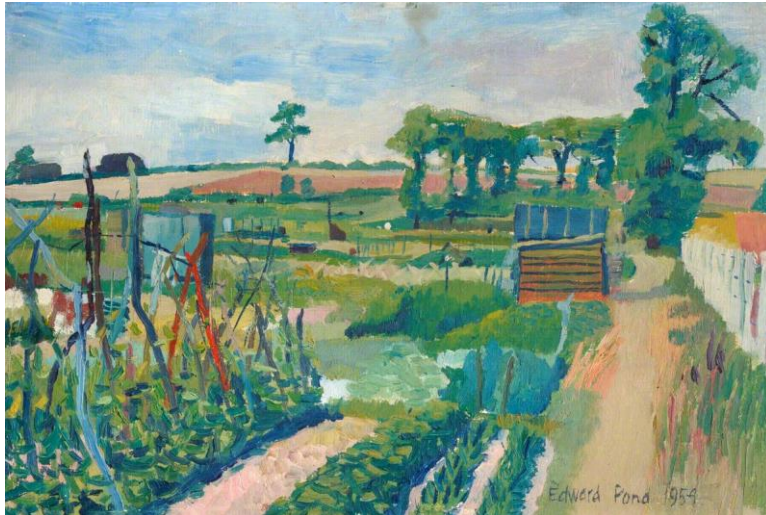


Figure 4. **Allotments at Chadwell Heath** - Edward Pond

In places where housing lacked gardens of a sufficient size, people might be allotted somewhere else in the neighbourhood. This practice continues to this day and allotments have become prized assets and a focus for communities to develop and (forgive the pun) blossom. The skills and the folk lore still being handed on from generation to generation.



Figure 5. **Tatton Park NHS Trust 2009** Chris Cyprus

Another great passion for gardeners is visiting gardens on large country estates to draw inspiration for use on a smaller scale. The calendar is also full of garden shows and festivals, one of which takes place close by at Tatton Park. Of course there is a commercial dimension to these activities but they help to maintain such places as part of a wider national heritage.

Figure 6. **Saint Fiacre Statue** - Cathedral at Lisieux (see above)

CRAFTY KIDS

1. There is still time I think to sow some **Sunflower Seeds** either in pots or in the ground. Not surprisingly they grow best of all in a place where they can see the sun for a lot of the day. As they grow taller they sometimes need a little help from a garden cane or stick. Make sure that you put something on top of the stick to make it safe so that people don't poke their eyes with it. Sunflowers are just like human beings some grow taller than others, they come in a variety of shades and the flowers can be as big as dinner plates or as small as saucers. Most produce just one flower while some have more. Wouldn't it be great if our neighbourhood had lots of sunflowers to keep us smiling later in the year?



2. More and more people are doing all they can to make their gardens places that are kind and friendly to all God's creatures, even slugs and snails. Every creature has its place and because some are food for the birds a garden that looks after its bugs and slugs gets more of these beautiful flying visitors. There are some flowers and plants that butterflies really like and don't forget the moths who also need food even though they fly around mostly at night. There are lots of ideas to help you on the following link provided by the RSPB:

<https://www.rspb.org.uk/get-involved/activities/give-nature-a-home-in-your-garden/>