

Paradise: God's Garden and Ours

Can we think of God's saving acts without focusing our whole attention on the cross?

According to the earliest stories, God created a magnificent Garden of Eden and turned it over to Adam and Eve.

However, because these humans were not prepared to handle the knowledge associated with Eden, they were separated from the Paradise that surrounded them.

Through the centuries, though Old Testament believers tried, they could not reconnect with what was lost. Amos, for example, longed to have his people "seek good and not evil", but the reality of constant goodness eluded them.

Finally God said "Let me show you!" To illustrate how much he cared for what had been created, God gifted us with Jesus who reversed the earlier consequences associated with Eden. Through God's gift of love, all the darkness that hung over the images of the Garden was wiped away. It became possible that believers could again find meaningful life in the restored paradise.

Their hearts and minds and senses could be spiritually illuminated. They (and we) could become grounded in love, justice, non-violence and wisdom. They (and we) felt it was important to give expression to their love for one another, for themselves and for the creation.

The connection between the two eras was spelled out by John, the Gospel writer, who noted "God did not send his son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him."

That connection was affirmed by Jesus. "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me". And "I am come that you might have life, and have it to the full".

Today those whose faith formation enables them to feel empowered by paradise are compelled to live generously, compassionately and justly – always governed by truth.

As participants in paradise, we too become conduits for God's endless love.

(For deeper understanding about the meaning of "paradise" see the historical-theological text "Saving Paradise", written by Rita Brock and Rebecca Parker. Joyce Sasse)