



Garden Oasis

***"The Lord will surely comfort Zion
And will look with compassion on all her ruins
He will make her desert like Eden,
Her wastelands like the garden of the Lord.
Joy and gladness will be found in her,
Thanksgiving and the sound of singing."***

(Isaiah 51: 3)

Dear Opal,

As I looked out upon my garden this morning and noted the dew like sparkling diamonds that decorated the velvet purple blossoms of the clematis trailing its way up the white lattice, it filled my heart with overwhelming joy of being truly blessed by the Creator of all that is good.

Then, allowing my eyes to soak in the beauty of the landscape, the realization of how significant a garden was to Jesus added great worth to the magnificence of the moment, followed by a time of deep contemplation and worship.

Certainly, as one reads in the Gospels about the three years when Jesus was proclaiming the good news of the kingdom of God, a garden was the most frequently visited place where our Savior went to be alone with the Father.

In fact, as recounted in the Gospels, many things of great importance in the life of Jesus happened in a garden. It was there that he often sought solace in a time of communication with the Father, a habit that was truly prominent in his journey on earth. The Garden of Gethsemane is where he taught his disciples and spent time in cherished fellowship while resting from the hardships of the day. 'Twas in a garden where he fell to the ground in overwhelming sorrow as sweat poured from his body like drops of blood just prior to the Crucifixion. It was the spot where Judas led the soldiers to arrest him. He was also buried and resurrected in a garden, and spent time there during his post Resurrection with his disciples prior to his Ascension to heaven.

Given this important summary regarding how Jesus felt about a garden, have you stopped to contemplate what it is about this type of landscape that touches mankind so radically? Have you ever looked upon a garden as a reflection of God's character?

Opal, after I studied in depth the various ways it paints a marvelous portrait of God, it became incredibly moving to my soul. Not only is a garden filled with magnificent colors and textures that are truly eye popping, but are planned in a way that humans can enjoy unique drama as each season unfolds.

Poet, Helen Lowrie Marshall, in her book, "A Gift So Rare", wrote an inspirational poem called, "The Wonder of It All", capturing the miracles that abound in gardens that literally give it a life of its own.



The Wonder of It All

***There are so many small, incessant things---
The constant whir of tiny unseen wings,
The steady beat of hearts too small to hear---
That never reach the conscious eye or ear.***

***The crack of seedlings breaking through the pod,
The tender grasses pushing through the sod;
The bustle of the world down underground,
The air above so full of soundless sound.***

***The world within a world, where lives repeat
Their own small cycles, infinite, complete;
The unseen, steady flow of death and birth---
The business of an ever-changing earth.***

***The order and the wonder of it all---
A universe so great---a world so small!***

In thinking back to childhood, my father always became excited when spring arrived and labeled it as a time of rebirth. The crocus flower would first peep its head through the left-over snow as a prelude in front of the energy and beauty that was just over the horizon. Oh, how fragile it appeared clothed in its coat of pretty yellow or purple, yet unafraid of the possibility of inclement weather that always was a part of the march into another season.

Then, right on its heels came the daffodils that didn't mind wading through a blanket of snow, either. Although bowing their heads in a humble posture toward their Creator, they still made sure they were recognized as they swayed in the breeze decked out in their finery of yellow and white.

Of course, directly behind them came lilacs dripping with such an aromatic fragrance that not only were the butterflies brought to attention, but allowed occupants in every room of the house to breath in their sweet heady perfume.

As a result, before one could say, "Jack Robinson", the entire landscape was teeming with the beauty of apple blossoms, accompanied by the scent from mock orange blooms, all surrounded by a backdrop of bloodred rhododendrons and blue bells, just to name a few.

Thus, when strolling through the garden and observing the wonder of it all, not only were the honeybees buzzing from bloom to bloom, but were serenaded by a cacophony of songbirds showing off for a possible mate by singing melodious notes whose composition was being directed by the "Great Conductor", God, himself.



Then, as each day grew warmer and the spring colors of the plants acclimated to their surroundings, it became apparent the aging process had prompted a change that signaled the cycle of life was right on time. In the dry, hazy June weather, when the soil on which we trod had changed its texture, it was obvious that our earth was farther from heaven. Even the birds, that sang more vigorously, chirped with less vigor and vivacity. The hazy, lazy days of summer had made their entrance.

Now, instead of a time of rebirth, it had passed and the season of small fruits had arrived. Gooseberries and huckleberries were ripe for the picking in preparation for the brown crusted delicious pies that would find their home on the kitchen window sills. Though, truly, it was blackberry time that precipitated the search for the old straw hats and lard buckets that would soon be full to overflowing. What hot work for three little girls whose eyes roamed the prickly vines for the largest berries of the season that would of course take up more room in the bucket; a decision that would complete the task at hand in a more rapid fashion.

Then, suddenly, without knowing why, a slight heaviness of heart brought on by the sad realization that we were living between our hopes and their fulfillment occurred; emotions brought to light by the cycle of life in nature.

However, not allowing our dreams to be dashed, following much scratching brought on by ticks and chiggers that made their home beneath the blackberry bushes, we dawned our well-worn swimsuits and headed for the old "Bill Byrd" swimming hole as a perfect ending to a very hot day; a time when the temperature gages would easily reach 100 degrees and initiate a desire for the arrival of autumn.



Opal, a voice that would herald the next season was always that of our dad excitedly calling his three daughters to rise earlier than usual in order to witness the splendorous beauty of the hills that overlook Piney River. You see, 'twas at sunrise, when their foliage would wear their most brilliant autumnal colors; so stunningly spectacular that it appeared as if the Great Painter had concocted such vivid hues that the entire hillside was set ablaze with his artistry. Suddenly, mother nature had dressed the landscape all around our little farm in an attire fit for a queen; one more precious than gold.

Using this as a backdrop, the pastel blooms worn by the fruit trees in spring had matured into luscious fruit that would soon reappear in shiny jars filled with jams and assorted food stuff for winter time.

Then, right on schedule, the October red sunset sky would quickly respond to the shortening of daylight as the entire world around was preparing for a long winter's nap; a time when everything took on a different meaning.

As a result, in due course, the bleached herbage of the fields on the farm greeted the onlooker wearing a frost like sheen that resembled the approaching promise of snow. Thoughts like stubble on the wind turned once again to the marching ahead of the seasons; a process preplanned by God that symbolized the mystery of how the aging process is his way of preparing for the new life that would one day be counted as the next generation. It was obvious that the grand reaper's hand had passed over the fields signaling that for everything there is a season, a time for every activity under heaven.



Then, in God's good and perfect time, the garden oasis, now fast asleep, signaled to all creatures great and small that old man winter was knocking at the door. Ready or not, the time had come to stoke the fire in the old pot-bellied stove and dig into the vintage trunks for hats, coats, and gloves.

Consequently, punctual as usual, the sky magically opened, allowing the snow-stars to gently float down from heaven landing on the tips of noses, all the while covering the ground in a blanket of white that would sparkle and blink, resulting in a wonderland to behold. All around, as far as the eye could see, was a mystical land that, although shiny and cold, was replete with a welcoming solitude and stillness; a kind of thoroughwort, or boneset for the soul.

The final curtain had been closed, leaving only an afterglow of light, a postlude that announced 'twas time for the Creator to light the first star that would lead his children home.



Opal, when recounting the lessons taught by the garden oasis, initially, there were feelings of melancholy that soon transitioned into a joyful celebration of the soul, all due to another, more spiritually symbolic example that overpowered

all the other images each season brought to mind. You see, the true character of God is represented in an incredibly astonishing light due to his love and great desire to eternally be with his children.

Thus, when viewed from this perspective, the passing of the seasons become an astonishing gift of eternal life for his entire creation. Since, spring represents rebirth, when God's Son, Jesus, was first born as a babe in human form, all the sweetness of the season took on even greater beauty. Then, during the summer of his journey, he grew in knowledge and confounded even the temple priests with the depth of his wisdom. Truly, he was about his Father's business. Then during the autumn of his life that lasted three years, he proclaimed to those that would listen the good news of the kingdom and readied the disciples he had so carefully trained for his departure. The harvest was ripe for the picking. There were souls to save and lessons to be learned before the next season arrived.

However, the winds of winter brought the sacrificial sandals that only God's Son could fill; that being to die on the cross for the sins of the sons and daughters the Father had created and loved. Thus, the words, "for dust thou art, and unto dust thou shalt return", took on a totally new meaning for each and every one of God's children willing to believe.

Opal, in summary, the dark cold bleak winter time will not claim the seed buried beneath the soil indefinitely for those that have accepted Christ. Instead, death had been forever conquered by our Savior, who was crucified, dead, and buried but arose from his winter sleep on the third day. An eternal spring had arrived that was a symbol that his children would one day rise from their winter state and be with the Lord forever. Glory halleluiah! What a Savior!



As our closing time together, let us remember the soothing words to the wonderful old hymn:

Be Still My Soul

*Be still, my soul: The Lord is on thy side;
With patience bear thy cross of grief or pain.
Leave to thy God to order and provide;
In ev'ry change he faithful will remain.
Be still, my soul: Thy best, thy heav'nly Friend
Thru thorny ways leads to a joyful end.*

*Be still, my soul: Thy God doth undertake
To guide the future as he has the past.
Thy hope, thy confidence let nothing shake;
All now mysterious shall be bright at last.
Be still, my soul: The waves and winds still know
His voice who ruled them while he dwelt below.*

*Be still, my soul: The hour is hast'ning on
When we shall be forever with the Lord,
When disappointment, grief, and fear are gone,
Sorrow forgot, love's purest joys restored.
Be still, my soul: When change and tears are past,
All safe and blessed we shall meet at last.*

*Love,
Colene*

