

# ***Places Where God Comes - Eden***

**Genesis 2:4 - 3:13,22-24**

PREPARED BY  
KEN GEHRELS  
PASTOR  
CALVIN CHRISTIAN REFORMED CHURCH OF OTTAWA  
ONTARIO, CANADA

As far as I am concerned it is one of the toughest things a person can do - move, that is.

I hate moving.

Much as I have done it over the last years, I find it tough to have to uproot and live in a new setting.  
New house - not yet a home! Different neighbours. New surroundings. Having to make new friends.  
I don't deal very well with change like that.

Perhaps you are the same way.

Perhaps you also experience a tug from time to time – a tug of sentiment, a tug of wistful longing to go back to your roots and at very least drive through the old neighbourhood where you used to live -

- your former stomping grounds
- your old place.

Drive slowly through the streets.

Perhaps get out in front of the house where you used to live, and see the memories in your imagination.

Can be tough, sometimes.

Especially when the neighbourhood changes.

That's happened in my hometown.

Very little resembles the early years of my childhood. The hamlet of Newtonbrook had just been subdivided and swallowed up by the township of North York in 1950's development. We had a mushroom farm behind our house, and fields beside us and across the street. That's where I climbed trees, learned to ride a bike and skate, played road hockey and went to school.

Hardly recognize the place now - swallowed up by the city of Toronto, no fields, huge homes, ditches replaced by curbs and sidewalks, high rise apartments and office towers, busy streets.

And - recently my parents left Toronto, moving out of the place where I was born and raised.

Know what that did?

It left me without a home.

Oh - don't misunderstand me. I am blessed with a terrific home here in Ottawa, and a wonderful family. There's no place that I'd rather be.

But there's no going back to the **place** where I came from.

There's no more returning to my **place** of origin.

The **place** of my roots is gone.

And that's a loss.

It's a loss because **place** matters.

**Place** matters because we are people of **place**.

More than just spirit, we are people of flesh and bone,

made for a see / feel / touch world.

made to be in a **place**.

God created us not just to **be**, but also to **belong**.

He created us to **be somewhere**.

He created us for **place**.

That how it has always been - right from the very start of Creation.

Our first human parents were created to **be somewhere** -

to be, actually, there - in the garden, in Eden.

God creates an ordered world out of primeval chaos.

He plants and prepares a garden.

And then,

having made humanity,

puts them, male and female, into that Garden.

Eden - the home of humanity.

Eden - the **place** for people.

the **place** where we are meant to be.

Understand Eden. More than anything -

It is the place of God's care and love.

It is the place where God and humanity could walk and talk together.

It is the place where humanity could find fulfilment in doing the tasks for which God created them - stewardship tasks, tasks of caring for and developing Creation.

It is the place, surrounded by the intimate care and love of God, that man and woman could build relationships and find wholeness with each other.

The place of security.

The place of fulfilment.

The place of belonging.

God's place.

Our place.

That's Eden.

Represented this morning by the icon of fruit -representing a cluster from the Tree of Life - eternal life, our life that is found in God, the life in Eden..

Which is what makes Genesis 3 such an enormous tragedy.

Because that wonderful **place**

the **place** where we belong

the physical space that gives meaning, roots, and security to our living

this **place** is vandalized by the Evil One, defaced by human sin.

A curse settles on creation.

Man and woman realize they are naked -

fully exposed to each other.

They can't stand that full exposure - emotional, spiritual and physical.

And they cover themselves up - v.7 - they sew fig leaves together.

Walls go up for the first time between one human being and another.

A sad foretaste of centuries to come when walls will go up between people - walls of misunderstanding and distrust;

walls of oppression and abuse;

even murderous walls, as Genesis 4 so tragically depicts..

After the tragedy of sinful rebellion, Eden is transformed.

The place of security and fulfilment and belonging is deeply damaged.

Peace is shattered.

Uncertainty rules.

Fear now enters the once good place.

Most horribly - Adam and Eve,

and with them all their descendants,

are evicted from their place of origin.

We lost our **place**.

If someone were to ask them where they were from, all they could would be to point to the west, point back to Eden, point back to where the cherubim stood with the flashing sword to prevent their return.

They become the first homeless people.

And because of that, **we** are

in a deep, spiritual sense

also homeless.

GOSPEL!! - Hear the great, good news!

The Creator was not content to leave humanity in that homeless state.

He wasn't content with merely a memory of walking and talking with His created children in the cool of the garden evening.

So a plan is set in motion.

A rescue plan.

A plan to remove the curse.

A plan to restore Eden.

A plan to bring humanity home

to **re-place** them where they belong.

Which is the whole reason for the season of the year that we are now entering. This Sunday marks the beginning of a new year in the Church calendar. That new year starts with the commemoration of Advent. Advent, the four weeks prior to Christmas, is the season of looking towards what is coming.

We commemorate the first coming of the Creator's son to earth.

And we look forward to His second coming.

This year, our Advent theme is **place**.

Remembering that we are **dis-placed**.

Remembering that God's plan is to **re-place** us.

And seeing that renewal of our life **place** coming to us through Jesus.

He restores our **place** in the family of God.

He **re-places** our right to enter God's presence in prayer.

He, in a deep and mysterious way, **re-places** Eden.

He said to His followers:

*I go to prepare a **place** for you.*

*I will come and take you to be with me,  
that where I am you may be also.*

*Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not be afraid.* [from John 14]

Yes - do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not be afraid.

If you do not know where you're from,

If you're not sure whether you've got a home,

If there is no one to come home to

- these can be quite troubling.

- they can instill fear.

Especially if you are without a place and left **alone**.

Remember what I said earlier about Eden.

It was the place of security, and fulfilment, and belonging - and it was those things **first of all** because it was the place where humanity was surrounded by the intimate care and love of God.

Eden was God's place, first.

And, through His inviting grace, also became our place.

Whenever we live, today, in a zone where God is present, we can in some way or another, experience a hint of Eden.

When, on the other hand, we live away from God, we live as **dis-placed** people, we are homeless people.

Hear what the prophet Isaiah says about that in chapter 59 of his prophecy:

*Surely, the arm of the Lord is not too short to save, nor his ear too dull to hear. but your iniquities have separated you from your God; your sins have hidden his face from you, so that he will not hear.*

Sin separates.

Sin isolates.

Sin displaces.

Thanks be to God, then, for Jesus.

For apart from His advent on earth, His coming into this **place** of earth marked by ever so much separation and isolation and displacement,

we would ALL be without hope.

The coming of Jesus means that for all who believe in Him the cherubim will no longer block the way back into Eden.

There will no longer be an angel preventing us from being able to walk and talk with God. Instead God Himself reaches His divine arms out and says, "*Welcome home, my child.*"

It begins when you can fold your hands and begin your day in a quiet moment of prayer.

It accompanies you into the office when a little voice inside reminds you that you're not there alone, not working alone - but you're doing it under the watchful, caring Presence of the Lord. You represent Him in that workplace. You do that work for Him.

It is there to anchor you even in those sleepless night moments when all is quiet and you perhaps wonder why you even bother to continue to struggle on with your life - when it feels rather pointless and empty. There is a Holy, Eternal, Powerful Being who declares that your life is not pointless or empty. Somewhere, somehow He will bring meaning to it.

Remember the deep words of Psalm 23 -

*Yes, even when I go through the deepest, darkest valley I will not fear, for you are with me.*

A hint of Eden.

"God - you **are** with me. Somehow this **place** where I am,  
Somehow this place has become YOUR **place**.  
And so I can keep going.  
For you are here."

And so, friends -

I don't know about you, but in this season of Advent,  
I will wait.

I wait for the final fulfilment of that which we only have now in hints.

I wait for the fulfilment when I'll be able to see what now I experience only through belief and trust - the full presence and power of God.

I wait for the fulfilment when the angel guard at the gate of Eden will be told to stand down, and humanity will be ushered back into perfect Paradise at the return of Jesus.

I wait for the day when sin will be destroyed.

I wait for the day when all barriers between people will be removed, when all misunderstandings and broken bonds between people will be healed.

The first Adam was responsible for our being **dis-placed** from Eden and the presence of God.

The second Adam, Jesus, is responsible for our being **re-placed** back into the Presence of God, and having a place RSVP'd for us in the new Eden.

That is His Christmas gift to all who will surrender their lives to Him;  
to all who will invite Him into their existence;  
who will offer the control of their existence to Him.

It is His gift to you, my friend.

A secure gift.

A gift of **place**.