

## **"My Garden"—"His Garden"**

(No. 2475)

A SERMON INTENDED FOR READING ON LORD'S-DAY, JULY 26, 1896.

DELIVERED BY C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON, ON THURSDAY EVENING, JULY 20, 1882.

"Awake, O north wind, and come, you south; blow upon my garden, that the spices thereof may flow out. Let my Beloved come into His garden and eat His pleasant fruits." Song of Solomon 4:16.

WHAT a difference there is between what the Believer was by nature and what the Grace of God has made him! Naturally, we were like the waste howling wilderness, like the desert which yields no healthy plant or verdure. It seemed as if we were given over to be like a salt land which is not inhabited—no good thing was in us, or could spring out of us. But now, as many of us as have known the Lord are transformed into gardens—our wilderness is made like Eden, our desert is changed into the garden of the Lord. "I will turn to you," said the Lord to the mountains of Israel when they were bleak and bare, "I will turn to you and you shall be tilled and sown." And this is exactly what He said to the barrenness of our nature. We have been enclosed by Grace, we have been tilled and sown, we have experienced all the operations of the Divine Farmer. Our Lord Jesus said to His disciples, "My Father is the Farmer," and He has made us to be fruitful to His praise, full of sweetness where once there was no fruit and nothing that could give Him delight.

We are a garden, then, and in a garden there are flowers and fruit. And in every Christian's heart you will find the same evidences of culture and care—not in all, alike, for even gardens and fields vary in productiveness. In the good ground mentioned by our Lord in the parable of the sower, the good seed did not all bring forth a hundredfold, or even sixty-fold. There were some parts of the field where the harvest was as low as thirty-fold and I fear that there are some of the Lord's gardens which yield even less than that. Still, there are the fruits and there are the flowers in measure. There is a good beginning made wherever the Grace of God has undertaken the culture of our nature.

I. Now coming to our text, and thinking of Christians as the Lord's garden, I want you to observe, first, that THERE ARE SWEET SPICES IN BELIEVERS.

The text assumes, when it says, "Blow upon my garden, that the spices thereof may flow out," that there are, in the Lord's garden, sweet flowers that drip with honey, and all manner of delightful perfumes. There are such sweet spices within the Believer's heart—let us think of them for a few minutes and first, let me remind you of the names of these sweet spices.

For instance, there is faith. Is there anything out of Heaven sweeter than faith—the faith which trusts and clings, which believes and hopes, and declares that, though God shall slay

it, yet will it trust in Him? In the Lord's esteem, faith is full of fragrance. He never delighted in the burning of bulls and the fat of fed beasts, but He always delighted in the faith which brought these things as types of the one great Sacrifice for sin. Faith is very dear to Him. Then comes love and, again, I must ask—Is there to be found anywhere a sweeter spice than this—the love which loves God because He first loved us, the love which flows out to all the brotherhood, the love which knows no circle within which it can be bounded, but which loves the whole race of mankind and seeks to do them good? It is exceedingly pleasing to God to see love growing where once all was hate—and to see faith springing up in that very soul which was formerly choked with the thorns and briers of doubt and unbelief! And there is also hope which is, indeed, an excellent Grace, a far-seeing Grace by which we behold Heaven and eternal bliss. There is such a fragrance about a God-given hope that this poor sin-stricken world seems to be cured by it. Wherever this living, lively hope comes, there men lift up their drooping heads and begin to rejoice in God their Savior. You do not need that I should go over all the list of Christian Graces and mention meekness, brotherly kindness, courage, uprightness, or the patience which endures so much from the hand of God—

whatever Grace I might mention, it would not be difficult at once to convince you that there is a sweetness and a perfume about all Grace in the esteem of Him who created it—and it delights Him that it should flourish where once its opposite was found growing in the heart of man. These, then, are some of the saints' sweet spices.

Next, notice that these sweet spices are delightful to God. It is very wonderful that we should have within us anything in which God can take delight. Yet when we think of all the other wonders of His Grace, we need not marvel at all. The God who gave us faith may well be pleased with faith. The God who created love in such unlovely hearts as ours may well be delighted at His own creation. He will not despise the work of His own hands—rather will He be delighted with it and find sweet complacency therein. What an exaltation it is to us worms of the earth that there should ever be anything in us well-pleasing to God! Well did the Psalmist say, "What is man, that You are mindful of Him? And the son of man, that you visit Him?" But God is mindful of us and He does visit us! Of old, before Christ came into this world in human form, His delights were with the sons of men—much more is it so now that He has taken their nature into Heaven, itself, and given to those sons of men His own Spirit to dwell within them! Let it ravish your heart with intense delight that though often you can take no complacency in yourself, but go with your head bowed down like a bulrush and cry, "Woe is me!" yet in that very cry of yours, God hears a note that is sweet and musical to His ears!

Blessed is repentance, with her teardrops in her eyes, sparkling like diamonds. God even takes delight in our longings after holiness and in our loathing of our own imperfections. Just as the father delights to see his child anxious to be on the best and most loving terms

with him, so does God delight in us when we are crying after that which we have not yet reached—the perfection which shall make us to be fully like Himself! O Beloved, I do not know anything that fills my soul with such feelings of joy as does the reflection that I, even I, may yet be and do something that shall give delight to the heart of God, Himself! He has joy over one sinner that repents, though repentance is but an initial Grace—and when we go on from that to other Graces and take yet higher steps in the Divine life—we may be sure that His joy is in us and, therefore, our joy may well be full.

These spices of ours are not only delightful to God, but they are healthy to man. Every particle of faith that there is in the world is a sort of purifier. Wherever it goes, it has a tendency to kill that which is evil. In the spiritual sanitary arrangements which God made for this poor world, He put men of faith—and the faith of these men—into the midst of all this corruption to help to keep other men's souls alive, even as our Lord Jesus said to His disciples, "You are the salt of the earth." The sweet perfumes that flow out from the flowers which God cultivates in the garden of His Church are scattering spiritual health and sanity all around! It is a blessed thing that the Lord has provided these sweet spices to overpower and counteract the unhealthy odors that float on every breeze! Think, then, dear Friends, of the importance of being God's fragrant flowers which may yield perfumes that are delightful to Him—and that are blessed and healthful to our fellow men! A man of faith and love in a Church sweetens all his brethren. Give us but a few such in our midst and there shall be no broken spiritual unity! There shall be no coldness and spiritual death, but all shall go well where these men of God are among us as a mighty influence for good. And, as to the ungodly around us, the continued existence in the earth of the Church of Christ is the hope of the world! The world that hates the Church knows not what it does, for it is hating its best friend! The spices with which God is conserving this present evil age, lest His anger should destroy it because of the growing corruption, are to be found in the flowers which He has planted in the garden of His Church!

It sometimes happens that these sweet odors within God's people lie quiet and still. There is a stillness in the air, something like that which the poet Coleridge makes "The Ancient Mariner" speak of in his graphic description of a calm within the tropics. Do you, dear Friends, ever get into that becalmed condition? I remember, when I was young, reading an expression—I think of Erskine's—in which he says that he likes a roaring devil better than a sleeping devil. It struck me, then, that if I could keep the devil always asleep, it would be the best thing that could possibly happen for me—but now I am not so sure that I was right! At all events, I know this—when the old dog of Hell barks very loudly, he keeps me awake! And when he howls at me, he drives me to the Mercy Seat for protection. But when he goes to sleep and lies very quiet, I am very apt to go to sleep, too—and then the Graces that are within my soul seem to be absolutely hidden! And, mark you, hidden Grace, which in no

way reveals itself by its blessed odors, is all the same as if there were none to those that watch from the outside and, sometimes, to the Believer himself!

What is needed, in order that he may know that he has these sweet perfumes, is something outside himself. You cannot stir your own Graces! You cannot make them more! You cannot cause their fragrance to flow forth! True, by prayer you may help to this end, but then that very prayer is put into you by the Holy Spirit—and when it has been offered to the Lord, it comes back to you laden with blessings. But often something more is needed—some movement of God's Providence and much more—some mighty working of His Grace to come and shake the flower bells in His garden and make them shed their fragrance in the air. Alas, on a hot and drowsy day, when everything has fallen into a deep slumber, even God's saints, though they are wise virgins, go as soundly asleep as the foolish virgins and they forget that "the Bridegroom comes!" "While the Bridegroom tarried, they all slumbered and slept" and, sometimes, you and I catch ourselves nodding when we ought to be wide awake! We are going through a part of that enchanted ground which John Bunyan describes and we do not know what to do to keep ourselves awake.

At such times, a Christian is very apt to ask, "Am I, indeed, planted in God's garden? Am I really a child of God?" Now I will say what some of you may think a strong thing, but I do not believe that he is a child of God who never raised that question! Cowper truly wrote—

"He has no hope who never had a fear  
And he who never doubted of his state,  
He may, perhaps—perhaps he may—too late.  
I have sung and I expect that I may have to sing again—  
"'Tis a point I long to know.

Oft it causes anxious thought— Do I love the Lord or no? Am I His, or am I not?"

I cannot bear to get into that condition and I cannot bear to keep in it when I am in it, but still, there must be anxious thought about this all-important matter. Because you happened to be excited on a certain occasion and thought you were converted and were sure of Heaven, you had better look well to the evidence on which you are relying. You may be mistaken, after all, and while I would not preach up little faith, I would preach down great presumption! No man can have a faith too strong and no assurance can be too full if it really comes from God, the Holy Spirit. But if it comes merely out of your fancying that it is so and, therefore, will not examine yourself, whether you are in the faith, I begin to make up my mind that it is not so because you are afraid to look into the matter! "I know that I am getting rich," says a merchant. "I never keep any books and I do not need any books, but I know that I am getting on well in my business." If, my dear Sir, I do not soon see your name in the Gazette, I shall be rather surprised!

Whenever a man is so very good that he does not need to enquire at all into his position before God, I suspect that he is afraid of introspection and self-examination—and that he dare not look into his own heart! This I know, as I watch the many people of God committed to my care, here—I see some run on for 10 years or more serving God with holy joy and having no doubt or fear. They are not generally remarkable for any great depth of experience, but when God means to make mighty men of them, He digs about them and soon they come to me crying and craving a little comfort—telling me what doubts they have because they are not what they want to be! I am glad when this is the case, I rejoice because I know that they will be spiritually better off afterwards! They have reached a higher standard than they had previously attained. They have a better knowledge, now, of what they ought to be. It may be that, before, their ideal was a low one and they thought that they had reached it. But God has revealed to them greater heights which they have to climb—and they may as well gird up the loins of their mind to do so by Divine help!

As they get higher, they perhaps think, "Now we are at the top of the mountain," when they are really only on one of the lower spurs of it. Up they go, climbing again! "If once I can reach that point, I shall soon be at the summit," you think. Yes, and when you have, at last, got there, you see the mountain still towering far above you! How deceptive is the height of the Alps to those who have not seen them before! I said to a friend, once, "It will take you about 13 hours to get to the top of that mountain." "Why," he replied, "I can run up in half-an-hour." I let him have a try and he had not gone far before he had to sit down to pant and rest. So you think of a certain height of Grace, "Oh, I can easily reach that!" Yes, just so, but you do not know how high it is. And those who think that they have reached the top do not know anything about the top, for he who knows how high is the holiness to which the Believer can attain will go on clambering and climbing, often on his hands and knees, and when he has reached that point which he thought was the summit, he will sit down and say, "I thought I had reached the top, but now I find that I have but begun the ascent." Or he may say with Job, "I have heard of You by the hearing of the ear," (and then I did not know much of You, or of myself, either), "but now my eye sees You. Therefore I abhor myself and repent in dust and ashes."

You see, then, that there are sweet spices lying in Christians, like hidden honey and locked-up perfume within the flowers on a hot day!

II. What is needed is that THOSE SWEET ODORS SHOULD BE DIFFUSED. That is to be our second head. Read the text again—"Awake, O north wind; and come, you south; blow upon my garden, that the spices thereof may flow out."

Observe, first, that until our Graces are diffused, it is the same as if they were not there. You may go through a forest and it may be abounding in game, yet you may scarcely see a hare or notice a pheasant anywhere. There they lie, all quiet and undisturbed, but, by-and-by, the beaters go through the woods making a great noise and away the pheasants fly! And

you may see the timid hares run like hinds let loose because they are disturbed and awakened. That is what we sometimes need, to be awakened and stirred from slumber! We may not know that we have any faith till there comes a trial— and then our faith starts boldly up! We can hardly know how much we love our Lord till there comes a test of our love— and then we so behave ourselves that we know that we do love Him. Oftentimes, as I have already reminded you, something is needed from without to stir the life that lies hidden within. It is so with these sweet flowers in the spouse's gar-den—they need either the north wind or the south wind to blow upon them that they may shed abroad their sweet odors.

Notice next, that it is very painful to a Christian to be in such a condition that his Graces are not stirring. He cannot endure it! We who love the Lord were not born again to waste our time in sinful slumber! Our watchword is, "Let us not sleep, as do others." We were not born to inaction—every power that God has put within us was meant to be used in working, striving and serving the Lord! So, when our Graces are slumbering, we are in an unhappy state. Then we long for any agency that would set those Graces moving. The north wind? Oh, but if it shall blow, then we shall have snow! Well, then, let the snow come, for we must have our Graces set in motion—we cannot bear that they should continue to lie quiet and still. "Awake, O north wind!"—a heavy trial, a bleak adversity, a fierce temptation—anything so long as we do but begin to diffuse our Graces! Or if the north wind is dreaded, we say, "Come, you south!" Let prosperity be granted to us! Let sweet fellowship with our Brothers and Sisters awaken us and holy meditations, full of delight, stir our souls! Let a sense of the Divine life, like a soft south wind, come to our spirit. We are not particular which it is, let the Lord send which He pleases, or both together, as the text seems to imply, only let us be awakened! "Quicken You me,

Lord, according to Your Word"—whichever Word you shall choose to apply—only quicken Your servant and let not the Graces within me be as if they were dead!

Remember, however, that the best Quickener is always the Holy Spirit and that blessed Spirit can come as the north wind, convincing us of sin and tearing away every rag of our self-confidence, or He may come as the soft south wind, all full of love, revealing Christ and the Covenant of Grace and all the blessings treasured for us therein. Come, Holy Spirit! Come as the Heavenly Dove, or as the rushing mighty wind, but come! Drop from above, as gently as the dew, or come like rattling hail, but come, blest Spirit of God! We feel that we must be moved, we must be stirred, our heart's emotions must once again throb to prove that the life of God is really within us! And if we do not realize this quickening and stirring, we are utterly unhappy.

You see also, dear Friends, from this text, that when a child of God sees that his Graces are not diffused abroad, then is the time that He should take to prayer. Let no one of us ever think of saying, "I do not feel as if I could pray and, therefore,

I will not pray." On the contrary, then is the time when you ought to pray more earnestly than ever! When the heart is disinclined for prayer, take that as a danger signal and, at once, go to the Lord with this resolve—

"I will approach You—I will force My way through obstacles to Thee! To You for strength will have recourse, To You for consolation flee!"

When you seem to yourself to have little faith, and little love, and little joy, then cry to the Lord all the more! "Cry aloud and spare not." Say, "O my Father, I cannot endure this miserable existence! You have made me to be a flower, to shed abroad my perfume, yet I am not doing it. Oh, by some means stir my flagging spirit till I shall be full of earnest industry, full of holy anxiety to promote Your Glory, O my Lord and Master!" While you are thus crying, you must still believe, however, that God the Holy Spirit can stir your spirit and make you full of life again. Never permit a doubt about that fact to linger in your bosom, else you will be unnecessarily sad! You, who are the true children of God, can never come into a condition out of which the Holy Spirit cannot lift you up!

You remember the notable case of Laodicea, which was neither cold nor hot and, therefore, so nauseous to the great Lord that He threatened to spue her out of His mouth? Yet what is the message to the angel of that Church? "Behold, I stand at the door and knock." This is not said to sinners, it is addressed to the angel of the Church of the Laodiceans! "Behold, I stand at the door and knock: if any man hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and will sup with him, and he with Me." Oh, matchless Grace! He is sick of these lukewarm professors, yet He promises to sup with them and that they shall sup with Him! That is the only cure for lukewarmness and decline—to renew heart-fellowship with Christ—and He stands and offers it to all His people right now! "Only open the door, and I will sup with you, and you shall sup with Me."

you whose Graces are lying so sinfully dormant, who have to mourn and cry because of "the body of this death"—for death in you seems to have taken to itself a body and to have become a substantial thing, no mere skeleton, but a heavy, cumbrous form that bows you down—cry to Him who is able to deliver you from this lukewarm and sinful state! Let everyone of us put up the prayer of our text, "Awake, O north wind; and come, you south; and blow upon my garden, that the spices thereof may flow out."

III. Our third and closing head will help to explain the remaining portion of our text—"Let my Beloved come into His garden, and eat His pleasant fruits." These words speak of THE COMPANY OF CHRIST AND THE ACCEPTANCE OF OUR FRUIT BY CHRIST.

I want you, dear Friends, to especially notice one expression which is used here. While the spouse was, as it were, shut up and frozen, and the spices of the Lord's garden were not flowing out, she cried to the winds, "Blow upon my garden." She hardly dared to call it her Lord's garden! But now notice the alteration in the phraseology—"Let my Beloved come into His garden and eat His pleasant fruits." The wind has blown through the garden and

made the sweet odors to flow forth—now it is no longer, "my garden," but, "His garden." It is wonderful how an increase of Grace transfers our properties! While we have but little Grace, we cry, "my," but when we get great Grace, we cry, "His." Wherein you are sinful and infirm, Brothers and Sisters, that is yours—you rightly call it "my"—but when you become strong and joyous, and full of faith, that is not yours! And you rightly call it, "Hi's." Let Him have all the glory of the change while you take all the shame and confusion of face to yourself that ever you should have been so destitute of Grace! So the spouse says, "Let my Beloved come into His garden. Here are all the sweet perfumes flowing out. He will enjoy them—let Him come and feel Himself at home among them. He planted every flower and gave to each its fragrance—let Him come into His garden and see what wonders His Grace has worked."

Do you not feel, Beloved, that the one thing you need to stir your whole soul is that Christ should come into it? Have you lost His company lately? Oh, do not try to do without it! The true child of God ought not to be willing to bear broken communion for even five minutes, but should be sighing and crying for its renewal! Our business is to seek to "walk in the light as God is in the light," fully enjoying communion with Christ our Lord. But when that fellowship is broken, then the heart feels that it has cast all its happiness away and it must robe itself in sackcloth and sorrowfully fast. If the Presence of the Bridegroom shall be taken away from you, then, indeed, shall you have cause to fast and to be sad. The best condition a heart can be in, if it has lost fellowship with Christ, is to resolve that it will give God no rest till it gets back to communion with Him—and to give itself no rest till once more it finds the Well-Beloved!

Next, observe that when the Beloved comes into His garden, the heart's humble but earnest entreaty is, "Let Him eat His pleasant fruits." Would you keep back anything from Christ? I know you could not if He were to come into His garden! The best things that you have, you would first present to Him, and then everything that you have, you would bring to Him and leave all at His dear feet. We do not ask Him to come to the garden that we may lay up our fruits, that we may put them by and store them up for ourselves—we ask Him to come and eat them. The greatest joy of a Christian is to give joy to Christ! I do not know whether Heaven, itself, can exceed this pearl of giving joy to the heart of Jesus Christ on earth! It can match it, but not exceed it, for it is a superlative joy to give joy to Him—the Man of Sorrows, who was emptied of joy for our sakes and who now is filled up, again, with joy as each one of us shall come and bring his share and cause to the heart of Christ a new and fresh delight!

Did you ever reclaim a poor girl from the streets? Did you ever rescue a poor thief who had been in prison? Then I know that as you have heard of the holy chastity of the one, or of the sacred honesty of the other of those lives that you have been the means of restoring, you have said, "Oh, this is delightful! There is no joy equal to it! The effort cost me money, it cost me time, it cost me thought, it cost me prayer, but I am repaid a thousand times!"



Then, as you see them growing up so bright, so transparent, so holy, so useful, you say, "This work is worth living for, it is a delight beyond measure!" Often persons come to me and tell me of souls that were saved through my ministry 20 years ago. I heard, the other day, of one who was brought to Christ by a sermon of mine nearly 30 years ago and I said to the friend who told me, "Thank you, thank you! You could not tell me anything that would give my heart such joy as this good news that God has made me the instrument of a soul's conversion." But what must be the joy of Christ who does all the work of salvation—who redeems us from sin, and death, and Hell—when He sees such creatures as we are made to be like Himself and knows the Divine possibilities of glory and immortality that lie within us?

What are we going to be, Brothers and Sisters, we who are in Christ? We have not any idea of what holiness, glory and bliss shall yet be ours! "It does not yet appear what we shall be." We may rise even while on earth to great heights of holiness—and the higher the better—but there is something better for us than mortal eyes have ever seen or mortal ears have ever heard! There is more Grace to be in the saints than we have ever seen in them, the saintliest saint on earth was never such a saint as they are, yonder, who are before the Throne of the Most High! And I know not but that, even when they get there, there shall be a something yet beyond for them and that through the eternal ages they shall still take for their motto, "Onward and upward!"

In Heaven, there will be no, "Finis." We shall still continue to develop and to become something more than we have ever been before—not fuller, but yet capable of holding more—always growing in the possibility of reflecting Christ and being filled with His love! And all the while our Lord Jesus Christ will be charmed and delighted with us. As He hears our lofty songs of praise. As He sees the bliss which will always be flashing from each one of us. As He perceives the Divine ecstasy which shall be ours, forever, He will take supreme delight in it all! "My redeemed," He will say, "the sheep of My pasture, the purchase of My blood, borne on My shoulders, My very heart pierced for them, oh, how I delight to see them in the heavenly fold! These, My redeemed people, are joint heirs with Me in the boundless heritage that shall be theirs forever! Oh, how I delight in them!"

"Therefore, comfort one another with these words," Beloved, and cry mightily that, on this Church, and on all the Churches, God's Spirit may blow to make the spices flow! Pray, dear Friends, all of you, for the Churches to which you belong. And if you, my Brother, are a pastor, be asking especially for this Divine wind to blow through the garden which you have to cultivate, as I also pray for this portion of the garden of the Lord—"Let my Beloved come into His garden, and eat His pleasant fruits." The Lord be with each one of you, Beloved, for His dear name's sake! Amen.

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—811, 814, 778.

EXPOSITION BY C. H. SPURGEON: JOHN2011-29.

Verses 11-12. But Mary stood outside at the sepulcher weeping: and as she wept, she stooped down and looked into the sepulcher, and saw two angels in white sitting, the one at the head, and the other at the feet, where the body of Jesus had lain. You see, dear Friends, love is very patient and persevering. The other disciples had gone home, but not Mary, she stands outside the sepulcher and still waits, for she cannot go till she has seen her Lord. Love, however, has many sorrows for, as Mary stood outside the sepulcher, she was weeping. Oftentimes your love to Christ will make you sorrowful when you, for a while, lose His Presence. It will be a great sorrow to you if your Lord should seem to have hidden Himself from you. But see how quick-sighted love is—Mary saw the angels, whom the other disciples might have seen if they had not gone home. One of the beatitudes is, "Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God." And love is one of the most eminent signs of purity. I do not wonder, therefore, that love saw angels, since love sees God Himself!

13. And they said to her, Woman, why do you weep? They could not understand Mary's tears. Their question seemed to say, "Christ the Lord is risen from the dead and all the streets of Heaven are ringing with hallelujahs because the great

Conqueror has returned bearing the spoils of His victory. Why do you weep? Are you not one of those for whom this redeeming work was done? 'Woman, why do you weep?'"

13. She said to them, Because they have taken away my Lord, and I know not where they have laid Him. That was enough to make any of Christ's loved ones weep and if ever you hear a sermon which has not Christ in it, you may well go down the aisle weeping. And if any ask why you weep, you may reply, "Because they have taken away my Lord, and I know not where they have laid Him."

14. And when she had thus said, she turned herself back, and saw Jesus standing, and knew not that it was Jesus. A strange and sad unbelief had taken possession of her and there is nothing that blinds the eyes so quickly as unbelief. Christ is near you, poor Soul, near you in your trouble, but you do not know that it is Jesus! Open your eyes! May God the Holy Spirit touch them with His heavenly eye salve, that you may see that it is Christ, Himself, who is close beside you!

15. Jesus said to her, Woman, why do you weep? Whom do you seek? She, supposing Him to be the gardener, said to Him, Sir, if you have borne Him hence, tell me where you have laid Him, and I will take Him away. Her supposition was wrong in one way, but right in another, for Jesus is the Gardener, and His Church is His garden! There was one gardener in whom we fell—here is another and a better Gardener in whom we rise! It is He, and He alone, who can properly tend all the plants of His Father's right-hand planting. He is the Gardener, though not the one that Mary supposed! But what a strange request this was for her to make—"If you have borne Him hence, tell me where you have laid Him, and I will take Him away." Could she have carried away the body of Jesus if it had been there? If so, what a ghastly load for her tender frame to bear! Yes, but she would have done it,

somehow or other, for, if faith laughs at impossibilities and cries, "It shall be done!" it is love that actually does the deed of holy daring. The task that seems well-near impossible is readily performed when the spirit is invigorated by love.

16. Jesus said to her, Mary. In the simple utterance of her name, there were tones which she could not mistake. It was the sweetest music she had heard since her Lord's last message from the Cross! "Mary." "Why, surely," she must have thought, "it is the Master's voice calling me by name!"

16. She turned herself and said to Him, Rabboni; which is to say, Master. Or, "My Master!" The word, "Rabboni" means something more than, "Master." Mary seems to say, "Greatest and best of all Teachers, I know Your voice! Now that You have called me by my name, I recognize You, and I wait to listen to the instruction You are ready to impart to me."

17. Jesus said to her, Touch me not; for I am not yet ascended to My Father. "There will be time enough for the fellowship your heart craves"—

17. But go to My brethren, and say to them, I ascend to My Father and your Father; and to My God and your God. Practical service is better than personal rapture! Mary would gladly have held her Lord, but He said to her, "Go to My brethren." You will always find that it is best and safest to do what Jesus tells you, when He tells you and as He tells you. What a delightful message is this from the risen Christ! "Go to My brethren, and say to them, I ascend to My Father and your Father; and to My God and your God."

18, 19. Mary Magdalene came and told the disciples that she had seen the Lord, and that He had spoken these things to her. Then the same day at evening, being the first day of the week, when the doors were shut where the disciples were assembled for fear of the Jews, came Jesus and stood in the midst, and said to them, Peace be to you. If they had possessed more faith, they would have left a door open for Jesus to come in, however anxious they might have been to shut out the Jews! I am afraid, dear Brothers and Sisters, that we, also, are sometimes more anxious about shutting out the Jews than we are about letting in Christ! I mean, we are very particular in trying to keep out our own troubles and cares, but if we get Jesus within, we shall not think of the Jews, nor of our troubles and cares—they will all disappear as soon as He appears.

20. And when He had so said, He showed to them His hands and His side. Then were the disciples glad, when they saw the Lord. That was enough to make them glad. The most glad sight out of Heaven and the most glad sight in Heaven, itself, is to see the Lord!

21. Then said Jesus to them again, Peace be to you: as My Father has sent Me, even so send I you. "I am the Messiah, the Sent One; you, too, shall be My missionaries, My sent ones." It is but another form of the same word.

22, 23. And when He had said this, He breathed on them, and said to them, Receive you the Holy Spirit: whoever sins you remit, they are remitted to them; and whoever sins you

retain, they are retained. That is to say, "As you proclaim My Gospel, I will back up your message. When you preach of pardoning blood, I will make it efficacious. When you declare to penitent sinners that their sins are remitted, it shall be so. And when you tell those who believe not that they are condemned already, and that unless they repent they shall abide in condemnation, their sins shall still be retained." The true minister of God speaks not apart from the Word of God—and when He speaks the Word of God, the God of the Word is, Himself, there to make it effectual. It shall be no wasted thunderbolt! It shall fall in reality and what the servant of Christ declares according to the Scriptures shall be proven to be true.

24. But Thomas, one of the twelve, called Didymus, was not with them when Jesus came. Possibly he did not go out in the evening—it may be that he was a half-dead sort of Christian, like a great many people are in London. They think they have done finely if they go out on Sunday morning, but the evening—well, it is too cold for them, or they must find some other excuse for staying indoors! "Thomas, one of the twelve, called Didymus, was not with them when Jesus came." That was a great pity because Thomas would not only be a loser by his absence, but he would be sure to influence others, for he was an Apostle. Surely, whenever it is possible, we who are leaders in the Church—ministers, deacons and elders—should take care that we are not absent from the House of the Lord.

25. The other disciples therefore said to him, We have seen the Lord. But he said to them, Except I shall see in His hands the print of the nails and put my finger into the print of the nails, and thrust my hand into His side, I will not believe. There is something good about that declaration of Thomas, for a man is not bound to believe merely on the testimony of others. He should, if he can, endeavor to get evidence for himself. And as Christ is still alive, the very best thing is to go to Him! But there was also much that Thomas said which was very wrong—he had no right to demand that he should see the nail prints in Christ's hands and, worse still, that he should be permitted to put his finger into them, and to thrust his hand into his Lord's side. There was more than a little impertinence about that utterance—and something more, even, than an ordinary unbelief! And when we ask for signs and wonders from God and say that we will not believe except we have them, we are guilty of very presumptuous conduct. We are bound to look for evidence concerning Christ, but when the evidence is sufficient, we ought not, out of curiosity, crave for more.

26. And after eight days again His disciples were within, and Thomas with them. That was an improvement upon the meeting of the previous Lord's-Day evening. Thomas had learned, by this time, what he had lost the week before, so he was present on this occasion.

26, 27. Then came Jesus, the doors being shut, and stood in the midst, and said, Peace be to you. Then said He to Thomas. Picking out the one who most needed to be addressed, like the Good Shepherd seeking out the sick sheep first. "Then said He to Thomas"—

27, 28. Reach here your finger, and behold My hands; and reach here your hand, and thrust it into My side: and be not faithless, but believing. And Thomas answered and said to Him, My Lord and my God. It has been well observed that Thomas was the first person who ever proved to himself the Deity of Christ from the exhibition of His wounds. There is a good argument in it, which we cannot stay to explain at this time, but the very humanity of Christ has in it the doctrine of His Deity. You can easily argue from the one to the other. How Divine must He be who, in His condescension, took upon Himself our nature!

29. Jesus said to him, Thomas, because you have seen Me, you have believed: blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed. That blessedness can be reached by all of us who believe in Christ! Those who lived in this world before Christ came, saw His day by faith, and they were blessed. Those who lived in His day, saw Him in the flesh and trusted Him, were blessed. But we who cannot see Him, yet believe in Him, are the most blessed of them all!