

## **Easter sermon - Back to the Garden of Eden**

*Rev Dr Jos M Strengholt*

**Readings: Psalm 118:1, 14-29; John 20:1-18**

Hallelujah the Lord is risen

**He is risen indeed, hallelujah**

On this Easter Morning, let us shake off sadness and mourning.

“This is the day that the Lord has made, let us rejoice and be glad in it.” These words are taken from Psalm 118, a Psalm often quoted in the New Testament as fulfilled in Jesus Christ.

“He is the stone that the builders rejected but he has become the cornerstone” of God’s new temple: the church of Jesus Christ.

While we praise God for today, we do not look away from our problems today. The Psalm said, ‘Let us rejoice and be glad in this day’, and it immediately continues with the prayer: ‘Save us, we pray o Lord.’

We can be people of joy, even when we realise we have needs that we urgently need to be saved from.

God made our world beautiful, as a majestic temple where he lives. But the virus of humanity’s insurrection has infected everything. That virus even infected nature.

Mankind was made to guard and maintain the wonderful temple of this world, the Garden of Eden. That was where God walked and talked freely with humankind and where nature was at our service and not an enemy.

But we messed up. Adam and Eve, the gardeners of God, brought thorns and thistles into our world. So access to God was lost, and to the tree of eternal life. Two angels guarded the entrance to the garden of Eden, you know the story from the book of Genesis.

But God has reversed this malaise by coming to our world. He became a new Adam, to start a new humanity. He became like us. He subjected himself to our life, and to the thorns of Good Friday. There he took the curse on himself, in order to recreate our world.

After having been subject to our life, our misery, our death, he became alive again. On the first Easter morning, Mary went to the grave of Jesus, but she did not find him. Instead, she saw two angels sit on the stone bed where the body of Jesus had lain. One sat at the head, and the other one at the feet.

These two angels remind us of the angels that guarded the entrance to the garden of Eden. These two angels also stood over the ark of the covenant, this golden chest behind the curtain where God resided. In Israel, that symbolic place of God's residence, the Holy of Holies, was often compared with the garden of Eden.

Interestingly, these angels were also embroidered on this great curtain that made access to God in the temple impossible. This curtain was torn from top to bottom when Jesus died. The way to God was opened, the way to the Garden of Eden was open again, thanks to Jesus Christ.

So those angels guarding the access to God had now become redundant. They could retire. Angels in the bible usually stand or fight, but we find these two sitting relaxed at the place where Jesus rose from the dead.

And then, when Mary, through her tears, sees Jesus, she first thinks He is the gardener. This is another reference to the garden of Eden, I think, where Adam was the gardener. But while Adam made thorns and thistles appear, Jesus - crowned with thorns - came to take them away. He is the one who recreates the world, nature, and who makes us new people. He also works in your life to renew you.

But that is a slow process. Nature and mankind still suffer from thorns and thistles. We are all aware of this, especially these days, as on a worldwide scale we experience that "the whole creation is groaning in the pains of childbirth", as the apostle Paul has it. "And not only creation, but we ourselves groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for the redemption of our bodies."

That is what we wait for. Jesus was rose from the dead, as the first one. And we, and this whole world, will follow. So the best is still to come.

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