

They were in the garden. A garden they all knew well, because, as the Gospel of John tells us, Jesus often met there with his disciples. Judas knew where they were because it was a place they often went together.

How appropriate that Jesus would often return, with his most intimate friends, to a garden, so they could pray and be near to God together. For it was a garden that was God's first gift to human kind, and in that Garden of Eden, man and woman lived fully connected with God every moment, resting confidently in God's intimate love and care. But since the day that Adam and Eve misused their freedom and made their choice to turn away from God, we humans have been left peering in at the gate of paradise – sometimes catching glimpses of what it would be like to live in intimate and constant communion with God, but having the fullness of that actualized life painfully just ever out of our reach.

I think it was the expectation that the Messiah, who was to come to earth to put everything right again, would be bringing back those perfect, sinless days – making the earth like Eden once again and putting all the righteous back inside those gates. But Jesus the Christ did not create a new Eden on earth. Instead he entered and lived and moved and had his being in the world exactly, starkly how it is. In fact, the deepest betrayal of his earthly life marched right into his own favorite garden, disguised in a disingenuous kiss from a trusted companion. And when Simon Peter tried to avenge this injustice, Jesus rebuked him, saying, "Put your sword back in your sheath. Am I not to drink the cup that the Father has given me?"

Not only did Jesus not recreate Eden on earth, Jesus' own experience among us was not precious, special or exempted from worldly pain. His life was filled with the pain of loss, betrayal, abuse, misrepresentation, misunderstanding, false accusation, hatred and death. Jesus knew fully, as we all do, what it feels like to be nothing but dust, and know that it is to dust that we will return.

The Book of Common Prayer defines Everlasting Life as a life in which we are united with all the people of God, in the joy of fully knowing and loving God and each other. How can we ever reach this fullness of life from our place outside the gate? The truth is that we cannot. We keep making the wrong choices, just as our ancestors in Eden did. We, like sheep, have all gone astray.

But Christ, our mediator, our Jacob's ladder, our friend and brother, came into this world to save sinners.

What a friend we have in Jesus,  
all our sins and griefs to bear!  
What a privilege to carry  
everything to God in prayer!  
O what peace we often forfeit,  
O what needless pain we bear,  
all because we do not carry  
everything to God in prayer.

Can we find a friend so faithful  
who will all our sorrows share?  
Jesus knows our every weakness;  
take it to the Lord in prayer.

The pain of being misunderstood, lonely or lost -  
bring it to Jesus, Jesus our Eden

Have you been betrayed? Abused? Neglected? Bring it  
to Jesus. Bring it all to Jesus.

Have we trials and temptations?  
Is there trouble anywhere?  
We need never be discouraged;  
take it to the Lord in prayer.

Are we weak and heavy laden,  
cumbered with a load of care?  
Precious Savior, still our refuge;  
take it to the Lord in prayer.  
Do thy friends despise, forsake thee?  
Take it to the Lord in prayer!  
In his arms he'll take and shield thee;  
thou wilt find a solace there.

Thank you, Lord Jesus. Amen