

**Sunday 22 August 2021**  
**Glynde Lutheran Church**  
**Sermon on Revelation 2:12-17**  
**Theme: “Bloom where you are planted”**  
**“Let God use you to change the weeds around you into**  
**flowers! or**  
**“Who will you lead home, in the area where you are planted”**  
*Part 3 of the Series on Revelation*

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***Introduction:***

I want to begin by making a confession to you: I was never much of a gardener in the past. In the early years of our marriage, Jenine would often try to get me out into the garden with her, but largely I resisted.... Gradually, though, I started getting out there with her, and in recent years, more and more I've enjoyed being in the garden and *growing vegetables*....

But I still can't get enthused about growing flowers. Yes, I guess that I should try working on this area of the garden.... Because it is not that I don't appreciate the beauty of flowers, it's just that.... Well, you can't eat flowers, can you!? Anyway, it's fortunate that in our household, my wife Jenine has a real love for flowers, and growing flowers.

Why am I beginning this message by talking about gardening, and about growing flowers in particular? Because this is the picture that I want you to have in your mind, as I speak God's message to you this morning: that of a flower garden, a garden with all sorts of flowers in it. Jesus loved using mind pictures, or parables, when he spoke God's message to people, and I think that that's a 'pretty' good example to follow as I speak God's message to you....

So the picture I want you to have in your mind this morning is that of a flower garden. Flowers can be planted in all sorts of situations. Some are planted in beds that are relatively weed free, while others get planted in beds that are full of weeds. So it is with us who are God's children, the flowers in God's garden. Some of us are planted in situations where there are hardly any weeds. Others of us are planted in situations where there are quite a few weeds, even many weeds.

Wherever we are planted, though, God wants us to bloom for Him. That's why you plant flowers: so that they will bloom and radiate beauty to all

around. And that's why God has planted each of us *who are His children through our Baptism and our faith in Jesus as our Saviour*: so that we will bloom for Him, and radiate His beauty to those around us.

That's our theme for this morning: "Bloom where you are planted" *in all that you do and say*.

Let's begin looking at this theme by looking at our Bible reading for this morning: the words of the risen, exalted Lord Jesus to the church at Pergamum. God's people there were planted among many weeds. In fact, there were far, far more weeds than flowers in God's garden in Pergamum. Listen again to what Jesus said through the apostle John to the church in Pergamum:

**This is the message from the one who has the sharp two-edged sword. I know where you live, there where Satan has his throne. You are true to me, and you did not abandon your faith in me, even during the time when Antipas, my faithful witness, was killed there where Satan lives (Rev. 2:12-13).**

The city of Pergamum was the centre of emperor worship in the Eastern part of the Roman empire. People in Pergamum were expected to sprinkle some incense before the image of the Roman emperor, and say, "Caesar is Lord". And most people did this.

Also in Pergamum, there was a huge temple to the Roman god, Zeus, and as well there was a temple to the so-called god of healing, Askelepias. So, you can see, God's garden in Pergamum had many weeds there, and it wasn't easy being a flower in God's garden there. In fact, as we learn from Jesus' words, one of the Christians there, a man by the name of Antipas, had died for refusing to worship the emperor. Jesus calls him "my faithful witness".

Jesus commends the Christians in Pergamum for being faithful to him, even in the midst of this sea of weeds, so to speak. But listen again to what else he say:

**But there are a few things I have against you: there are some among you who follow the teaching of Balaam, who taught Balak how to lead the people of Israel into sin by persuading them to eat food that had been offered to idols and to practise sexual immorality. In the same way, you also have people among you who follow the teaching of the Nicolaitans. Now turn from your sins ("Repent").**

**If you don't, I will come to you soon and fight against those people with the sword that comes out of my mouth (Rev. 2:14-16).**

Jesus is warning here against compromise with the surrounding world values. As one writer puts it:

**It was a temptation for the Christians in Pergamum to take part in heathen feasts and perhaps even to practice immorality which was an accepted part of the some of the pagan temple worship; *in other words, some of them were, it seems, taking part in the meals and even the orgies that happened in the temples of Pergamum.***

**Perhaps some of them, too, were tempted to compromise by sprinkling a little incense before an image of the emperor thinking *that it wasn't such a serious matter, for they really didn't mean it; in their hearts they knew that Christ was Lord.* But Jesus tells them that they must take a stand; they were not to tolerate or compromise with evil (Esther Onstad, *Courage for Today*, p. 20).**

So here in our Bible reading for today, Jesus speaks words of commendation and warning to the Christians in Pergamum, *Christians who are God's flowers planted in a garden full of weeds.* And Jesus finishes off his message to the Christians at Pergamum with a word of promise:

**To those who win the victory, *to those who are faithful to me until death, I will give some of the hidden manna, some of food of heaven.* I will also give each of them a white stone on which is written a new name that no one knows except the one who receives it. *The white stone is probably a token that can be used to admit a person to God's heavenly banquet (Rev. 2:17).***

Now all that Jesus says here to the Christians in Pergamum, I think, is very relevant to us.

We live in a very similar situation to that of the Christians in Pergamum. Sure, we are not being persecuted for our faith, but like the Christians in Pergamum, we are surrounded here in Australia and here in this Glynde area by a huge number of weeds. We are God's flowers, surrounded by a heap of weeds.

It may sound a harsh way of describing the majority of people around us who aren't God's people, but nevertheless it is a picture that Jesus used to describe those who are turned away from God. In Jesus' parable of the wheat and the weeds, Jesus pictures those who are turned away from God as weeds. In fact, Jesus talks about the weeds as *"those who belong to*

*the Evil One” (Matt. 13:38).*

Most of the people who live in our society live “in darkness” (*Eph. 4:18; Rom. 1:21*), rather than in the light of God. They have “forgotten God” (*Solzhenitsyn*), and they live life for themselves. Our society is full of people who have turned themselves away from God, and who centre their life on themselves and what they want, rather than on God. Our society is full of people who are lost, people who looking for meaning and purpose and fulfillment in life, but who are unable to find these things.

I guess weeds are things that we want to get rid of from our garden. When we see a weed in our flower garden, *or in our vegetable garden*, we immediately pull it up and get rid of it. But that’s not how God sees weeds in His flower garden!

Sure He hates the mess that the weeds are making of His garden, but He loves every single weed. Let me say that again! God loves every weed in His garden, and He wants every single weed to be transformed into a flower in His garden: He wants every weed to become a flower in His garden. *Oh, I know that weeds can’t change into flowers in our gardens, but in God’s garden they can! Weeds can change into flowers in God’s garden.*

Let me stop speaking in picture language for a minute. People can become God’s people, *God’s flowers*, by accepting the forgiveness that God offers and made possible for us all at great cost to Himself, and by allowing God to transform their life by receiving God’s Spirit into their life.

All this happens when a person is baptised, and when that person goes on growing as God’s child as he or she goes on trusting in Jesus as his or her Saviour, and goes on following Jesus in his or her life.

Most of us, though, are already flowers in God’s garden. What does God want us to do? Well, as Jesus reminds us in his words to the Christians in Ephesus, God wants us to...well, “bloom”.

God wants us to love people like Jesus did and does; He wants us to show others how life is lived trusting in Him as our dear Father and in Jesus as our Saviour; and He wants us to point people to Jesus as their Saviour and their Lord, to enable others to find their way home to God, to enable them to become flowers in God’s garden.

Can I finish this morning by telling you a story that reminds us that we bloom as God's flowers when we point others to Jesus as their Saviour and Lord.... The story that I want to tell you is entitled "Lost above the Pacific". It's a story that I came across when reading a Christian magazine....

It's the true story of what happened to a pilot of a small Cessna aircraft when he became lost over the middle of the Pacific ocean, way out to the east of the Eastern coast of Australia.

**The pilot's name was Jay Parkins, and he and a friend, Frank, were ferrying two small Cessna aeroplanes from San Francisco in America to Sydney in Australia for a fee of \$4000 per aircraft. The small Cessnas were equipped with extra fuel tanks, and basic navigation instruments were added to enable them to find their way across the Pacific ocean to Australia. Most important of all was the ADF, the automatic direction finder, which was put in both planes.**

**The two little planes made it across the Pacific ocean as far as Pago Pago in Samoa, but then disaster struck. Jay's friend's plane was so heavily loaded up with fuel that it didn't make it into the air and crashed into a lagoon at the end of the runway. Jay's friend, Frank, swam to safety.**

**As Jay circled low overhead, Frank radioed him to continue on to Sydney alone. He reminded Jay that it was worth four grand to them for him to continue. So Jay turned his plane westward and headed to his next stop, the tiny island of Norfolk island in the middle of the Pacific ocean.**

**This part of the journey should have been 'pretty' straightforward with the modern navigational instruments on the plane, *but for one thing: Jay was unaware that the glass window in his ADF, his Automatic Direction Finder, was broken, and that the glass was pressing on the indicator, causing a false reading to be given.* Consequently, when Jay looked for Norfolk Island some 14 hours later, it wasn't there where he thought it was. After flying around for a while looking for the island, and not finding it, Jay knew that he was in big trouble.**

**Jay radioed for help: "Auckland tower, this is Cessna 771, en route from Pago Pago to Norfolk Island. I have an emergency". The controller in the Auckland tower communicated Jay's distress signal**

to the only plane in the area, an Air New Zealand Boeing 767, Flight 308, which was flying home from Fiji with 88 passengers on board. It was captained by a veteran pilot, Captain Gordon Vettie.

Captain Vettie flew to the area where Jay was, but how does a huge airliner flying at 30,000 feet and at almost 1000 km/hour go about finding a tiny Cessna in the vastness of the Pacific? Captain Vettie tried a variety of things, including trying to get various radio fixes, and even dumping fuel to create a vapour trail, in the hope that Jay Parkins would see the vapour trail of the jet. But none of these things worked.

Then someone at Auckland had a brainwave. Jay was told to fly west towards the setting sun, and to tell the controller the exact time that the sun set. The calculations were made, and the exact longitude and latitude of Jay's aircraft were worked out. Then Captain Vettie flew straight towards this setting. Through the gloom of the sky, Captain Vettie eventually found the lost Cessna.

Now it was decision time. What would they do? They were 200 kilometres from Norfolk Island, and 325 kilometres from Auckland. Norfolk Island was covered by a storm and darkness, and it would not be a safe or easy landing there. And on the other hand, Jay didn't know whether he would have enough fuel to make New Zealand.

Captain Vettie invited Jay to follow the Boeing, with its lights blazing in the night sky, to Auckland and safety. But he radioed to Jay, "It's your call". Jay had to choose: Norfolk or Auckland? Jay radioed back to Captain Vettie, "Take me all the way". And Captain Vettie responded, "OK, follow me, and I'll take you all the way".

Captain Vettie slowed his big jet to virtually landing speed, and Jay in his Cessna followed away from the storm towards New Zealand.

All was fine until about ten kilometres out from Auckland, Jay's motor began to misfire as his tanks began running out of fuel. Two kilometres out from the Auckland airport, with the runway lights clearly visible, the motor coughed once more and died. Jay then glided the rest of the way onto the runway, where he rolled to a stop surrounded by jubilant workers who had come to meet him on emergency vehicles. Jay had been in the air for some 23 hours.

That's the true story of the remarkable rescue of Jay Parkins. He was rescued when he decided to follow Captain Vettie to safety.

Our task as God's children is to point people to Jesus as the One who will lead them to safety.

If a person follows Jesus, *like Jay Parkins followed Captain Vetti*, then that person will find the safety and the security and the joy of life in God's presence.

*One final point in this regard.... Who does God want you to point to Jesus? In the area where you are growing as God's flower, who does God want you to point to Jesus?*

*Stop and think.... Who is it that God wants you to reach out to, and point them to Jesus?*

### ***Conclusion:***

This morning, we've been working with the picture of us who are God's forgiven children being flowers in God's garden. God's garden is not a weed free garden, though, by any stretch of the imagination.

As we live our life in God's garden, God wants us to bloom for Him: by trusting in Him as our dear Father and in Jesus as our Saviour and by loving the people around us like He does and like Jesus did and does...

...And by pointing others to Jesus as their Rescuer and their Lord, so that they may follow Jesus to safety *just as Jay Parkins followed Captain Vetti*, and so that they too may become flowers in God's garden.

May God bless each one of us, as we bloom to His glory.