

The Garden – Plant, Nurture, Harvest

Many of us have taken a leisurely stroll through Zion's Garden but have taken little thought of what it once was. The garden was once a home and has passed through many families, but for many of the locals they will remember it as the home of George Bowlus. It was in this building for many years the exchange of the Chesapeake and Potomac Telephone Company for the Middletown area was located and operated.

In April 1920, a neighbor of Mr. Bowlus had noticed fire and smoke coming from the second story of Mr. Bowlus' home. Soon the room was engulfed in flames and an alarm brought in the fire department. In the meantime several local men including George forced their way into the room on the second story and started to fight the fire fearing the flames had reached the roof. The fire was extinguished and the house was saved but extensive damage to personal property both on the first and second floors of the building. The community was fearful that the fire would spread to Zion Church. There was only a row of pine trees between the house and the church. But by the grace of God, no one was hurt and Zion was spared.

The church eventually bought the property and the house needing a lot of repairs was torn down. Today the memorial Garden now stands on this property and has for many decades brought much enjoyment to our members as well as our community. There are many stones and statues placed through out the garden to remember former pastors and members of Zion, the latest in memory of Audrey Boyer. The garden is maintained by Zion's member but there is one who you will find out there nearly every day, Gwen Bowlus. She works tirelessly and looks for no accolades and most often alone.



Zion often uses this area for informal services and prayer; Easter Sunrise service and sending off of our college students are two.

The Garden can be used as a Metaphor for a healthy church and it is in a healthy church where hope, help and healing are nurtured. Starting back in the beginning, Eden was a garden planted by God and inhabited by his creation, man who would work the soil. At God's appointed time, there was a garden in the place where Jesus was crucified and in the garden there was a new tomb in which no one had ever laid. The Garden is where God meets us both in our lives and in salvation.

A Gardener understands there is a season for everything and he waits for the proper time to execute it. Healthy gardens need healthy soil and the gardener spends much energy and expense to prepare it in order to create an agricultural environment for healthy plants. Plants need light, water, food and nutrients to thrive on. The tender plants as they grow need protection against disease, pest and predators and they need to be spotted and dealt with. The roots although hidden from view are often what will determine if the plant will flourish. The Gardener permits patience to rule and allows the plant to produce the desired fruit, recognizing that plants grow at their own speed and size. The fruit or blossom is the proof of a healthy plant.

So it is with a church. There is a season for everything and we must learn to wait...not to rush or be late. As Christians we need healthy soil so we must not neglect our nurturing of ourselves and continually strive to find ways to bring the Good News to people and create learning and growing opportunities for the young and old. We must understand the demographics of the community we live in to be effective in God's calling for Zion. Some things in the garden just can't be rushed and to do so invites failure. Mature Christians and a ministry that will be useful is a time consuming, and long process. There are no short cuts. But as the church continues to mature growth is apparent; some days larger and some days deeper and in this process of growing we bear the desired fruit.

Keep the health of Zion as a continued concern on your prayer list. We live in a world that needs the church and we cannot ignore it.

