

June 2015

Garden Tomb Newsletter

THE
GARDEN TOMB
Jerusalem

Our last newsletter was written from a cold Jerusalem, just after our second snowfall – the garden continuing its lengthy hibernation from the harsh winter. The seemingly harsh cull caused by the large snowfalls has turned out to be such a blessing, enabling much more light to reach

the lower plants, and we are so grateful to Rieke and Rami for all their hard work during the winter months resulting in such a wonderful garden. And now, with the garden in full bloom, olive trees bursting into life, and vines once again providing much needed shade, I am reminded of poetry by Winifred Letts *"That God once loved a garden we learn in Holy writ. And seeing gardens in the Spring I well can credit it."* We do hope you will enjoy reading this newsletter, catching up on the comings and goings of staff and vol-



unteers, and rejoicing in the testimonies. And thank you for your prayers, for your encouragement and for being part of the wider GT family.

This issue will be focusing on the experiences the volunteers had in the Garden Tomb

Molly shares some memories in the Garden

"We're both atheists," answered the father after I asked where he and his son fellowshipped in Mexico City. I'd already found out the son was in Jerusalem for a time studying Hebrew and Arabic so the father's answer left me a bit surprised, but also very pleased to lead them around the Garden Tomb on a tour in Spanish. The son specifically wanted to bring his father to the Garden Tomb as a "comparison study" with the Church of the Holy Sepulchre! I asked the son, Rogelio, why he was studying Hebrew in Jerusalem if he didn't believe in God. He responded that he loves languages.

It has been said before but I just can't help myself: being a volunteer guide at the Garden Tomb in Jerusalem



is a great privilege and joy. I'm so thankful I get to serve the Lord this way.

What a joy it was to take these two men that came on their own and, with amazing "one of a kind visuals", explain not the "where", but the "why" Jesus died on a cross! Then at the tomb, explain the hope, an eternal hope, we have because of the empty tomb.

It was wonderful to see

how the Lord led me to present the tour specifically for these Mexican men who, deep down, almost drowned out by false gods, have a desire to know Him.

Another out-of-the-ordinary visitor was Fatima, a Muslim lady and her three children. Fatima (not her real name) lives in the area around the Garden Tomb and always wanted to come in to see what a quarter of a million yearly visitors come to see. What joy I had in telling her about the gospel events. I explained that Jesus, Isa, had to die on the cross to take away our "shame." It was wonderful to explain to her that Jesus did not stay in the tomb but that He arose and is alive and the hope that this gives us that one day, we too, will be

with Him. I emphasized the key elements of the gospel but stayed away from elements that might build a wall of resistance or a feeling of having to defend one's lifelong beliefs regarding what she had been taught.

Fatima left content and excited to come back and learn more and bring some of her women friends. I love how the Father loves people, seeks after them, and wants to spend eternity with them (including you and me).

It is wonderful how, as we lead tours in the Garden, the Holy Spirit is at work to bring those that need to come, and is our "Guide" to the needs of each particular group.

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Meet the Volunteers: Adriana Craswell



I tried to think of an adjective to sum up the Garden Tomb and the one I found fitting was beautiful. I do not mean beautiful just as pretty, lovely, or charming I mean beautiful as in alluring, engaging, ravishing, arresting, magnificent, and winsome. This Garden is truly one of the most beautiful places on this entire planet and it is not the physical beauty in the flowers, trees, and the empty tomb but rather it is a beauty on an extremely deeper level. It is a beauty that almost can't be touched or described; it really is not even tangible. However, I will do my best to give you a glimpse into that beauty with as far as words will

allow. There is a deep beauty in the community among the volunteers and staff. The people who work here have such beautiful hearts that are completely sold out to Yeshua and serving Him, and there is such a joyful and loving presence found in all the workers. And when you gather a group of people like that with the same mission and mindset it creates marvelous fellowship and community. With volunteers from all over the earth, Messianic Jewish staff, and local believers we have an extremely unique place to call home. But a home is what it really is here because everyone is constantly lovingly encouraging,

the whole spectrum from agnostic to absolutely on fire for God, and the Garden impacts all different people in such unique ways (credit appropriately given to the Holy Spirit). One of my favourite moments in the Garden is to stand in the centre on a busy day and soak in the worship happening around me. This allows a glimpse into the future when "a great multitude that no one can count from every nation, tribe, people, and tongue will stand before the throne and before the Lamb" (Revelation 7:9).

The beauty is seen in the vast range of worship including acoustic guitars, dancing and clapping, waving flags and

banners, blowing shofars, soft hymns, beat boxing, and more; yet all connected by one important denominator: love for Jesus the Messiah. That one Truth runs strong and deep and brings brothers and sisters together in this place with almost nothing in

common except that core belief, and *that* is beautiful. Finally, there is an insurmountable beauty in the Message. Hopefully this is the most glaringly obvious beauty for all the visitors that come because that is the beauty we desire all the

carrying, and building one another up while keeping Jesus at the centre of it all. I have been spoiled like a granddaughter, questioned like a daughter, teased like a dear friend, and above all else I have been poured into like a sister in Christ and fellow servant of God. There is a remarkable beauty in the visitors. We have visitors coming from all different places, faiths, backgrounds, and circumstances. From the Arabs who come wondering what the place is all about to the passionate Christians who journeyed thousands of miles to Israel the Garden provides a site for all people to unite. The visitors cover

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Focus for Prayer & Thanksgiving:

- THE LORD'S CONTINUING PROVISION FOR THE GARDEN, INCLUDING VISITORS, VOLUNTEERS, STAFF, AND FINANCES
- SUSTAINABLE NUMBERS OF VISITORS DURING THIS QUIET SEASON
- GUIDANCE AND WISDOM FOR FUTURE DECISIONS AND PLANS
- SAFETY FOR OUR VISITORS, AND FOR OUR STAFF AND VOLUNTEERS



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world to see. This place itself is not of any significance, but what it represents and proclaims is the most significant message the world has ever heard. The progressing storyline of the Passion of Christ through the Garden creates a powerful visual aid for Jesus and what He did for us, and allows visitors to imagine and reflect. The climax is the empty grave but you cannot have that without first reflecting upon the beauty of the cross at Skull Hill. I once was guiding a group and there were two men at Skull Hill already who joined in listening to the

tour, and I was (obviously) focusing on the crucifixion of Jesus knowing we were building up to the Tomb. However, these men did not know that it was only the beginning portion and as soon as I was finishing up they interrupted and said, "wait a minute! You can't stop there, are you forgetting the ending? You have to tell the rest!" And with a smile I happily told them they were absolutely correct and the tour was only half-way done. Guides also mention two helpful discoveries of the cistern and winepress, and talk about the Byzantine

church and sometimes the crusader modifications; however, all of those pale in comparison to the finale when we talk about the most glorious beauty in the world: nothing. There is nothing in that tomb for it is empty. That is exactly what the angel said to those who came looking for Jesus: "He is not here. He has risen!" Therefore, this may be the greatest site in the world where people come looking for nothing, for our Lord only remained three short days until He conquered sin and death in a victorious strike called the resurrection. His



feet hit the floor Easter morning and our Savior rose and ascended into heaven to sit on His rightful throne, so there is truly nothing to see and *that* is the most beautiful of all.

Kieran Ryan, one of our volunteers, shares a memory from Easter.

My first visit to the Garden Tomb was in 1983 and I remember being overwhelmed by the Peace and Presence of God in this place. Having visited the Garden many times since then, I never had the privilege of being there for its Easter Services, until this year as a volunteer. The weekend began with the Good Friday Service at 09.30am and was attended by staff, visitors and invited guests. Paul Weaver, a fellow volunteer, led the service and the Rev. Simon Ponsonby, from St. Aldates, Oxford, UK who was our visiting guest speaker, gave us a very thought provoking message which focused us on the centrality of the Gospel story. It was an honour for me, personally, to be part of the G.T. music team with



Peter, Esther & Hannu in such an iconic location reflecting on the death, burial and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ. The Garden remained open until 5.15pm, allowing people to reflect on this marvellous event and volunteers were on hand to minister, as required. Saturday was a normal day with groups and individuals in the Garden and we were delightfully busy with over

1,200 visitors. There were three Services on Easter Sunday morning at 6.30am, 9.00am and 11.00am but the volunteers began their work at 4.45am as large crowds queued outside the main gate. Their on-going singing of 'Hallelujah! Jesus is Alive' set the atmosphere for the day. The music team from 'King of Kings' congregation led the worship and the Rev. Ponsonby gave the main Easter message. How wonderful it was to be in the Garden for the highlight of the Christian Calendar where over 2,500 visitors celebrated this wonderful weekend which has left an indelible mark on world history. On Sunday afternoon the Garden then closed and at 3pm the staff and volunteers were treated to a beautiful

meal, prepared by Sami and his wife, which has become an annual event following the services. Sami is a Trader from the Muslim community who works at the entrance of the Garden and is a very dear friend for many years. This is his way of thanking us. To be in the Garden at Easter, with people from every nation gathered in this unique place worshipping



the Lord Jesus was a fore-taste of Heaven and a very memorable experience for me.

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Anne Keast

This week we have had the pleasure of guiding our granddaughter around “our” Jerusalem. You know, the little special places of this city which are not overrun with tourist groups, but are filled with that uniqueness which is, in all its beauty and shabbiness, the city of the Great King. “Our coffee shop”, “Our spice shop”, “Our favourite walk”, etc. etc. Memories of events, people and surprise happenings over the years of visits, make what is ordinary to others, a blessing to us. Our granddaughter had been staying at the Abraham Hostel in Ha’neviim Street – the Street of the Prophets – a good place for a patriarchal name to rest. Although

Abraham is not counted as one of the Old Testament prophets, everything that he did was, in fact, prophetic. On the wall just inside the



door of the hostel is written in large letters – ABRAHAM, THE FIRST BACK PACKER. Humorous, yes, but also a deep truth about the man and his relationship with God.

A nomadic way of life but always under God’s direction. Here in the Garden we have come from afar to serve together the people who enter through those shiny green gates. I remember the first time that I walked through them as part of a tour group, one hot, dusty, noisy Jerusalem day. How could this oasis of peace and beauty exist in such a complex area, hidden from view, unseen by many and a joy to the soul?

I never imagined then that one day I would be part of the volunteer team. We did apply once to come as volunteers and received a very formal and polite refusal as they were well served for

the foreseeable future. Nevertheless, a few years later while on holiday in Eilat we were asked to contact the then director at a café as he was holidaying there as well. Our interview took place, we flew back to England and two weeks later we returned for our first three months duty at the Garden Tomb. Timing is everything with God and His people. We are all to an extent backpackers in this life. Father God delights in moving us on, surprising us with new experiences, new thinking, new acceptances and new challenges. So, keep your options open and your walking boots by the front door because you never know with God!

