

The Garden

On the last day of our trip to Johannesburg and Namibia this March, Colin and I joined with other family members for the internment of Colin's dad's ashes. Charles Alfred Germond, a faithful servant of God died peacefully on Thanksgiving weekend 2013. We did not attend his funeral service following his death, so this was an opportunity for us to say a goodbye to him, to commend him to God's safe keeping once again, and to commit his ashes to the ground.

Our family's church in Johannesburg is St. Martin's in the Veld. It is an old stone church in the suburbs where both Bishop Brian and Charles served as clergy. My dad attended there too, and longed to be a sides person. It is where I became an Anglican in 1981. Colin and I were married in its chapel, St. Paul's, thirty years ago this week.

At the back of the church, on the top of the Baptismal font is a framed manuscript with these words written by Louis 14th of France on it:

"I think more of the place where I was baptised than of the Cathedral of Rheims where I was crowned. For the dignity of a child of God which was bestowed on me at my Baptism is greater than that of a Ruler of a Kingdom. The latter I shall lose at death, the other will be my passport to everlasting Glory."



In the grounds of St. Martin's is a Garden of Remembrance where the ashes of hundreds of pilgrims have been buried over the years. You can see their names on plaques on the garden walls. My dad, Harold, rests in that garden, and so does Dorothy, Colin's mum.



Shaded by tall leafy trees, with verdant grass and areas of brightly coloured flower gardens and shrubs, you will often find family members sitting quietly on park benches praying. One has a feeling that many a weary or heavy laden person has found rest and comfort there. In the middle of the Garden of Remembrance is a large stone Celtic Cross, as well a brick labyrinth for pilgrims to walk around and reflect. It is a beautiful, peaceful place to visit.



St. Martin's in the Veld: Garden of Remembrance

We stood together as a family and listened to the same words that so many of you have heard in similar moments of burial – *“In sure and certain hope of the resurrection to eternal life through our Lord Jesus Christ we commend to Almighty God our brother Charles. The Lord bless him and keep him... Earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust.”* Then Charles's ashes were placed into a hole, already dug, in the ground and we placed rose petals over them - "Roses for ashes" the woman priest told us. We found a shovel and all took turns filling in the hole. "



Our great niece Hannah and her brother Finlay help hand out the rose petals. "Petals for ashes"

It felt good to have that time in the garden that Sunday morning. It provided much needed closure for us, and an opportunity to speak about Charles, to share stories, and to remember and give thanks for his life. It was also a reminder that even though Charles and other loved ones of ours had died, that we as Christians believe in the "Communion of saints (they were all around us), the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting (Jesus said, 'I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, even if he dies will live forever.' John 11)" Thanks be to God.

I share this memory with you, and the story of "The Garden at St. Martin's in the Veld" this Holy Week, because the next three days in our church are the holiest in the liturgical year. On Friday we will remember the day our Lord Jesus Christ was crucified, died and was buried in a borrowed tomb, perhaps in a similarly, peaceful, beautiful garden after he was taken down from the cross. I imagine that those who carried his lifeless body there were filled with just as much emotion that all of us feel as we say farewell and bury our loved ones. I am sure their hearts felt heavy and broken.

I expect that there was also a sense of failure amongst his followers. All that hope for a new kingdom, gone, vanished. What had been the point of it all, they no doubt wondered.

The last words of Jesus from the cross also had an air of finality about them - "It is finished." "Father, into your hands I commend my spirit." "Woman behold your son. Son behold your mother."

There was an ending that Good Friday. Make no mistake about it - Jesus died on the cross. But it was not the end of His story and neither is it the end of our story or the story of our loved ones. Jesus' death on the cross has given each of us the promise of new life. It is the ultimate love story. And that is our hope and our joy.

Easter weekend may begin with an ending, but it will end with a new beginning in the very same garden where it all seemed to end. Early on Sunday morning before dawn the stone will be rolled away. There will be an empty tomb, linen cloths wrapped and set to one side. There will be messaging angels, and runners declaring the good news that "He is risen." New life – for Jesus, for you, for me and for our loved ones.

If you find yourself in the garden of sadness, loss and grief this Easter, I pray that our risen Lord will find you, as he found Mary. I pray that He will call you by name as He did at your Baptism, and that you will recognise His voice and feel His love for you. I pray that your sorrow will turn to joy as you realize that you are never alone in the Garden of Remembrance - Jesus is always there offering new life. Be not afraid.

I look forward to welcoming you to our Holy Week liturgies.

Easter Blessings,

Anne

Holy Week Services

Holy Thursday: 7pm at the Ascension followed by an all night vigil in the Chapel.

Good Friday: 10:30am at St. Stephen's on the Hill

Holy Saturday: Easter Vigil at 8pm Church of the Epiphany

Easter Sunday 9am and 11am at the Ascension.

Children's Program at 11am on Sunday morning.

All Welcome!