

## Four Rivers of Eden

by Hannah Garrity

Inspired by Genesis 2:4b-15

Paper lace

The natural beauty and wealth of the earth are poetically described in this passage. The valley of the Tigris and Euphrates weave inward, framed to the north and east by the Pishon and Gihon. The surrounding seas—Mediterranean, Persian, Caspian, Red, and Black—lean in on this land of Eden. Beauty and abundance burst forth from the earth. Where are we from? Here, we are from the earth and the water; we are from the Spirit. God reaches down and places the first humans here and molds them from the elements in this land of abundance.

This image is built on the patterning of flowers in Saudi Arabia, in Syria, in Iran. Indigenous to the area, the Blood Lily, Jasmine flower, Damask rose, Purple Crown, and Desert rose bloom among the rivers and the seas of Eden. Where are you from? How is it beautiful?

As I studied the satellite maps of the Tigris and Euphrates rivers, the water, topography, vegetation, and human efforts to control them create a powerful sense of flow. The land appears in motion like water. From afar, the lines begin to look like patterns; repeating with variation, they remind me of the incredible intricacy of life, the omnipresence of God. There are visual parallels in the macro and the micro. A wide view of the lands and the waters of Earth are reminiscent of close-up images from within the human body. The layout that I chose for this image reminds me of dancing, of flowing to music, to the beauty of life. Where are you from? What energy and emotions do you feel about that place?

Recently, my church, Second Presbyterian in Richmond, Virginia, has been doing the important work of becoming both an Earth Care Congregation and a Matthew 25 church. We have explored the history of the church and are contemplating ways to acknowledge the land on which we stand and the actions which we have taken. I confess: before 2020, I had not thought a lot about colonialism and the theft of the indigenous people who previously inhabited the land. The most fulfilling part of this work is that we have uncovered significantly more questions than answers. When we have uncovered answers, they have often revealed pain inflicted on others and required honest grappling with the ramifications of the actions many of our ancestors took in the name of God. I appreciate this work because for the first time, it has allowed me to commit my acts of faith in the world in a way that is not hypocritical, needs no justification, and is deeply right. Where are you from? Where have you questioned your faith? Where has your faith held strong?

For forty years, I have sat in the pews, I have said the words, I have sung the songs, and I have wondered why I do not feel connected to the Church and to Jesus. But this inquiry about our own origins is connectional, is deeply needed, and is the work of Jesus. This is why people keep the faith. What were we doing for all of this time? Many of us have acted on the teachings we were raised with but could not see them put into action in the Church. We were talking about love, but were not acting on the love of Christ. A whole generation has left the mainline Church for this reason.

Where are you from? On whose land do you stand? From where does your authentic faith flow? How do you really connect with God? When do you feel like you are deeply and truly acting on the teachings of our faith?

How can the Church put into action your genuine faith as we move forward?

—Hannah Garrity

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