



**The Half Shekel Journal** by Ed Rice  
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When Otto opposed Catholic tradition and in 1842 declared the place of the skull to be Calvary, excavations in the garden beside Golgotha quickly followed.

In 1867 an empty sepulcher, hewn from stone, was discovered, and empty sepulchers were rare in this prime real estate for burial sites. (Recall that sepulchers were used for generations over here, and when overcrowded, a decayed ancestor's remains were put into a smaller box and retained in the same sepulcher.) This was likely the place, the very sepulcher, dug by Joseph of Arimathaea, where Jesus' body was laid to rest for 3 short days and nights. It was a borrowed tomb, but Joseph, the lender, would have likely retained it as empty as they found it on that Sunday morning 19 centuries ago. Also a tombstone of deacon Nonus, found in the Church of St. Stephen, made mention of this nearby Holy Sepulcher. Surely this is the most likely scene of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ if not the very tomb!



The presentation of all these facts, the careful language used so as not to offend Catholic or Orthodox listeners, the tip toeing done in the garden and the shekels it cost to get in here robbed us of the time and atmosphere needed to fully contemplate what happened here. Here it was that Mary Magdalene saw “the stone taken away from the sepulchre. Then she runneth, and cometh to Simon Peter, and to the other disciple, whom Jesus loved, and saith unto them, They have taken away the Lord out of the sepulchre, and we know not where they have laid him. Peter therefore went forth, and that other disciple, and came to the sepulchre. So they ran both together: and the other disciple did outrun Peter, and came first to the sepulchre. And he stooping down, and looking in, saw the linen clothes lying; yet went he not in. Then cometh Simon Peter following him, and went into the sepulchre, and seeth the linen clothes lie, And the napkin, that was about his head, not lying with the linen clothes, but wrapped together in a place by itself. Then went in also that other disciple, which came first to the sepulchre, and he saw, and believed.” (John 20:1-8) Here in this garden somewhere,

Mary met her Lord and her God as the Bible says on this wise, “Mary stood without at the sepulchre weeping: and as she wept, she stooped down, and looked into the sepulchre, And seeth two angels in white sitting, the one at the head, and the other at the feet, where the body of Jesus had lain. And they say unto her, Woman, why weepest thou? She saith unto them, Because they have taken away my Lord, and I know not where they have laid him. And when she had thus said, she turned herself back, and saw Jesus standing, and knew not that it was Jesus. Jesus saith unto her, Woman, why weepest thou? whom seekest thou? She, supposing him to be the gardener, saith unto him, Sir, if thou have borne him hence, tell me where thou hast laid him, and I will take him away. Jesus saith unto her, Mary. She turned herself, and saith unto him, Rabboni; which is to say, Master. Jesus saith unto her, Touch me not; for I am not yet ascended to my Father: but go to my brethren, and say unto them, I ascend unto my Father, and your Father; and to my God, and your God.” (11-17)



None of this could be comprehended and contemplated in the moment of being here, but they are forever the more precious because we were. When we would have yelled Hallelujah out loud and burst into song for “Christ the Lord is Risen Today,” we were shushed and told that there was a place



for that and this, here beside the empty tomb, was not 'the place.' The Nigerian groups that went both before us and



after us fained to not understand English, Hebrew or Arabic, and never ceased singing and praising God out loud all through the Garden Tour. When finally they ushered the all white preachers into the enclosed outdoor chapel where it was acceptable to sing and say Hallelujah out loud, the room filled with a submissive silence where some whispered 'Praise the Lord' and all wondered who was in charge of selection of a song list, leading the singing and then who was scheduled to preach today. The silence that broke out as we waited for those who would rather get to the gift shop before it closed than come to this worship service was graphic. Our worship lacks so much spontaneity and Spirit that I told Beverly “we should have broken off and gone through with one of the Nigerian groups who could not stop singing out loud.” Yeah even all the Garden Tour officials could not find their 'off button' nor

hush their praises to the crucified and resurrected Lord.

Stragglers finally came in clutching bags, song list were handed out and the 'on button' clicked so we could all sing together some songs of the faith. Strangely, with Nigerians out singing us, I remembered the worship services in Peru, and extended worship services in Corfu Haiti, and pondered what it was in our culture that required this scheduled and subdued worship service, even at the site of the empty tomb. It seemed that Christians in 3<sup>rd</sup> world countries that indeed pray in sincerity “Give us this day our daily bread,” are far more capable of spontaneous, unscheduled and extended worship of the God who saved them.



I do not know if it was on the schedule or spontaneous, but the southern youth of the group, Joshua Jones, rose to preach and shook some more of our cultural hangups. Yankees despise all the 'hacking' that southern preachers dramatize in their preaching. Although I doubled my “Amen” and “Preach it brother” outbursts during his preaching, the many fixed and empty stares at the floor set the mood for this service.

It is profoundly intriguing that here in a garden next to Golgotha, where tradition has long waged war with truth, culture waged war with Spirit. The culture that stifles our spontaneous worship needs to be contended with. Bev and I were forever changed by our visit to the garden tomb beside a hill called Golgotha. All we learned and all that happened here, both then and now, will change all our remaining Sundays when we openly worship remembering His empty tomb.