

Easter Sunday

April 21, 2019

Our Savior's Way
Worshiping Sundays 8:00, 9:30, & 11:00 AM
Pastor Mann

Just a few short days ago we were talking about Jesus dying on the cross. Now things are different. And it all began in a garden. A garden—it's a place of life and a garden is a place of death. The Bible tells us that both physical life and eternal life began in a Garden. Our first parents, Adam and Eve, were placed in a garden. It was a beautiful garden, lush and green, where the world was perfect and without sin. But into this garden came an act of sheer disobedience. Humankind turned away from God—they chose to disobey God and ignore His command. And as a result, they were thrown out of the beautiful garden. Their lives became a barren wilderness of suffering, despair, and death. The beautiful garden was only a memory.

Now, on Easter morning, we hear about another garden. It is the garden of eternal life. The Bible tells us that on a Friday Jesus was crucified. After he died, Jesus' friends took Him down from the cross. They took His body, wrapped it in a linen cloth and laid Jesus in a garden tomb. The next day, Saturday, was the Sabbath Day, so all was quiet. Then early Sunday morning something strange happened in the garden. Mary Magdalene and some of the other women went to the garden tomb. They wanted to put spices on Jesus' body. But He was gone. The tomb was empty!

I want you to imagine that first Easter morning. In the growing light, Mary Magdalene is the first to enter the garden. It is early. It is quiet. You can hear the birds beginning to stir and chirp. For

Mary, this is a garden of memories. It is a cemetery—a place meant to receive the lifeless bodies of loved ones. Into this garden, Mary walks, carrying a bundle of spices. Her purpose: she wants to tend to the lifeless body of Jesus, this rabbi, her pastor who has meant so much to her. Suddenly, to her amazement, she sees—the stone that sealed the door of the tomb is rolled away. She enters the tomb. The body is gone. Jesus is missing and nowhere to be found.

Panic-stricken, she doesn't know what to do. She is confused and beside herself with fear and anxiety. In her confusion, she runs into two of Jesus' disciples—Peter and John—who have also come to see the body. Breathlessly she blurts out: ***“They took the Master away and we don't know where they put him!”*** At this point she needs something. She needs some reassurance. She needs some kind of rational explanation for what is going on here. These last three days have been a whirlwind. Never before in her life, has she struggled with such feelings of emptiness, loss, and despair. But now, with the sun coming up on that first Easter morning things have changed!

This morning, I invite you to come to the garden with Mary, Peter, and John. I invite you to experience what they experienced—to see the stone rolled away, and the place where the body was laid—empty!—to listen to the voice of the angels—***“Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here. He is risen as He said!”***

Because Easter changes everything. I feel like I have had enough of cemeteries lately. As some of you know, my father, brother, and uncle died this past year. Last week I officiated at a funeral for a woman who was 84 and a young man who was 27. Cemeteries are gardens—neatly trimmed and planted with flowers. Did you know, you can buy a plot in the Sterling Cemetery for \$3,000?—40” by 10’. A plot in a cemetery is not cheap. But to buy a place in heaven—what would that cost? Are you ready for a shock?—It's absolutely free! Our place in heaven is absolutely free (to us) because Jesus paid the price on the cross. I have a friend. His name is Al Saunders. Al had one of these near-death experiences, where he stopped breathing and his heart stopped beating and he was

clinically dead—but then the doctors shocked him back to life. Al told me what he experienced in that time between life and death. “Pastor,” he said, “*it was like a beautiful garden, the most beautiful garden you could ever imagine.*” As members of the human race we are born, we live, and we die. But on Easter Sunday morning, in a garden 2000 years ago, Jesus rose to life again. The power of death has been broken. The good news is that because of Jesus, and the garden tomb, and the fact that the tomb was empty on Easter morning—the good news is that there is a resurrection day—and there will be a resurrection day for all of us! Jesus said, “***Because I live, you will live also.***” This is the Easter promise for all who believe.” **For Christ is risen! He is risen indeed!**