

St. Luke's Evangelical Lutheran Church  
Pastor Mark Gartner  
Sermon for Fifth Midweek Lenten Service – April 2, 2014

### **John 19:38-42**

**Later, Joseph of Arimathea asked Pilate for the body of Jesus. Now Joseph was a disciple of Jesus, but secretly because he feared the Jews. With Pilate's permission, he came and took the body away. He was accompanied by Nicodemus, the man who earlier had visited Jesus at night. Nicodemus brought a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about seventy-five pounds. Taking Jesus' body, the two of them wrapped it, with the spices, in strips of linen. This was in accordance with Jewish burial customs. At the place where Jesus was crucified, there was a garden, and in the garden a new tomb, in which no one had ever been laid. Because it was the Jewish day of Preparation and since the tomb was nearby, they laid Jesus there.**

Dear Followers of our Lord and Savior,

In our Wednesday Lenten services, we've been following the progress of the gospel: where it originated, how it spreads, and its objective. Last week we heard the gospel itself, which focuses us on the sufferings and death of our Savior Jesus Christ. Tonight we consider the outcome of the gospel. We might call it the Garden of Peace.

### **Theme: The Garden of Peace**

- 1. See the contrast**
- 2. Jesus gives us peace**

#### **1. See the contrast**

Gardens tend to evoke pleasant thoughts. We associate parks, large estates, arboretums, nurseries, and even simple flower beds with beauty, relaxation, serenity, and peace.

What exactly is peace and do people really have the true peace that God wants all to have? I thought I would do a little test and I googled the phrase, "*What makes us peaceful?*" I looked at the first thing that this search brought up. This was a blog that was being written to give people advice on how to find peace in this world. Here's what it said,

*In my opinion this is the biggest problem we face as "modern" people. We might have flashy gadgets and shiny cool things, but in the end when it comes down to peace of mind we have nothing.*

*I know for me at least whenever I used to come home for the day; I used to always be 90% tense and 10% anxious for reasons I couldn't understand. I had a house, family, friends and blessings I could never count. I just didn't understand. I was stuck in a never ending loop of distress and lack of peace. So then how did I overcome that?*

*Well a couple years ago, I learnt a secret. I was reading through some books when I read the most amazing quote:*

*Freedom from desire leads to inner peace.*

*– Lao Tse*

*This completely changed my beliefs and got me thinking. Why there is so little peace in the "modern" world is because of too many worldly desires. So in essence the flashy gadgets and shiny cool things I thought were my positives were actually bringing me down.*

*This brought a revolution in my life. I stopped worrying about always dressing good, I stopped caring too much about technology, I stopped worrying about having the best of everything.*

*The main thing was that I started to slow my life down. I found through experience that the world was moving way too fast and that it was taking away my peace. There was always better technology; fashion kept on changing and the best things never lasted. So the only way I could get my peace back was by slowing down and living at my pace. You can have peace of mind too; you just have to put your mind to it.*

You might be asking yourselves, what has this got to do with our Lenten series on Gardens and the gospel? Pastor, you have gone off the deep end. As you listened to the words of the person who wrote these words as words of advice on his blog to help people find peace, did it become evident that many people are looking in all the wrong places to find the peace that God has put right in front of us? And secondly has this type of thinking been used by the devil to cloud our view of the peace that God has brought us? So if true peace is not found in your inner self and the changing of your lifestyle, where is it found?

To answer that question, we need to get to the root of the problem. If you would consider what happened in the very first garden, the Garden of Eden, you would think that gardens might be hated by us as terrible symbols of violence, suffering, death, and future judgment. In the Garden of Eden, Adam and Eve had fallen into sin, and since then all of us have been born in sin and have been placed under God's curse of damnation. The horrors that sprouted in that garden reached full force on the cross. On that cross a man died – But not just a man -- since the very Son of God was placed under the curse of damnation. The powers of hell grinned, and demons danced with delight as they watched Jesus accused falsely and then nailed to a cross. Nailed to a tree, Jesus hung fully exposed to God's burning, accusing anger. All love had deserted him.

He hung there on the cross under his heavenly Father's holy hatred toward all sin. So intensely was God's anger focused on the cross that the world went dark around it. So heavy was God's justice on him, the earth beneath him shook. For though Jesus was totally innocent, the full responsibility for all people's sins weighed on him until, finally, it ripped his soul and body apart and he died. The fear and anguish was so strong that even many of Jesus' closest followers had deserted him, not knowing or even caring in what ditch his body might be flung by the Roman soldiers after the crucifixion.

But now we enter another garden, one near Golgotha, this one is the result of what happened at Golgotha. It was a garden estate for the rich. There Jesus' bloody and lifeless body would be planted. Now what a total contrast to the violence of the cross! Joseph of Arimathea, who was not one of the Twelve but sort of an unexpected friend, goes personally to Governor Pontius Pilate to retrieve the body. He goes boldly without the least hint of embarrassment or fear. We read in John chapter 19, **Later, Joseph of Arimathea asked Pilate for the body of Jesus. Now Joseph was a disciple of Jesus, but secretly because he feared the Jews. With Pilate's permission, he came and took the body away. He was accompanied by Nicodemus, the man who earlier had visited Jesus at night. Nicodemus brought a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about seventy-five pounds. Taking Jesus' body, the two of them wrapped it, with the spices, in strips of linen. This was in accordance with Jewish burial customs. At the place where Jesus was crucified, there was a garden, and in the garden a new tomb, in which no one had ever been laid. Because it was the Jewish day of Preparation and since the tomb was nearby, they laid Jesus there. (verses 38-42)**

Seventy-five pounds of spices matched that of a king's burial! Gently, quietly, they removed Christ's body from the cross and lovingly wrapped it—almost as if they were now treating all those wounds, soothing those tortured limbs. Preserving that precious body was their aim. They rescued it from being tossed into a ditch for the mass burials of peasants and criminals. Instead, they gently laid his body in a newly carved, never-before-used tomb—the first and only occupant in this Garden of Peace.

## 2. Jesus brings us peace

From the moment Jesus said “It is finished” on the cross, there was peace between God and the human race. The punishment for sin was over. We have nothing more to fear from God or from the devil. God is so friendly toward us now that just before Jesus breathed his last, he was able, with complete peace of mind, to commit his body and soul entirely to this God who had just been so harsh with him.

This is quite different than the peace that was talked about from my Google search. While that man was trying to find peace in himself, we can see today that the peace we truly need as lost and condemned sinners is found in Jesus and his work on the cross. Peace is found in the fact that Jesus died and was laid in a tomb, with the full confidence to his resurrection on the 3<sup>rd</sup> day.

To fully appreciate a garden, you need to slowly walk through it and observe all the colors and smells. Let’s take a stroll through this Garden of Peace and see the peace that is ours through Christ’s death, how the peace with God that he earned is evident. Jesus’ body was treated so richly and with such dignity. That demonstrates that the disgrace and horror of death is now gone. For us who trust in Jesus, this walk in the Garden of peace leads us to see death is no longer a punishment for sin. Our sins have been forgiven.

The pleasant way in which Jesus’ body was buried and its pleasant location show us that there is nothing for us to fear in death. As the Bible says, **“Precious in the sight of the LORD is the death of his saints” (Ps 116:15)**. King David also wrote so well in his Shepherd Psalm 23:4, **“Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me.”** Jesus went ahead of us through the experience of death to render it harmless. It was no coincidence that Jesus’ burial preparations were not completed on that day. He wouldn’t need it. For he would live again. Trusting Jesus, we will too.

In the spring, people plant gardens, looking forward to the new life that will spring up abundantly far greater and better than the original seed it came from. We look at this Garden of Peace, knowing that what was planted there will spring up on the third day and produce abundant life for all believers. For this reason and with this anticipation, it is okay to make our cemeteries look like beautiful, peaceful gardens, because our bodies are merely planted in the earth to rise again.

Thus we see that the Garden of Eden was intended for eternal life, but the Garden of Peace produces eternal life. From the Garden of Eden came the harvest of death and destruction, but from the Garden of Peace comes the harvest of souls for salvation. From the Garden of Eden sprouted sin, sadness, fear, and punishment, but from the Garden of Peace flourishes righteousness, joy, freedom, and hope.

Let us keep our eyes on the garden near Golgotha as we anticipate the life that blooms from it. For though our lives here on earth last only a season, there is for us in Christ an eternal springtime in heaven. Amen.