

Holy Trinity Lutheran Church Des Moines, WA March 30, 2014

John 19:38-42

The Garden of Peace

1. *A lack of peace?*
2. *Real peace!*

Hymns: 116 – *The Old Rugged Cross*

Distribution: 120 – 100

Closing: 114 (vv.1,2)

All Scripture quotations from NIV 1984

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.

Cemeteries are peaceful places, aren't they?

Perhaps some of you have been to Tahoma National Cemetery in Kent. I've been there a few times, and have always been struck by how peaceful and beautiful it is. Evergreen trees abound. The fields and meadows are lush and green. Flowers are everywhere. Mt. Rainier looms in the distance. Birds twitter. As people talk, they use hushed tones. It is a peaceful, beautiful place. Many cemeteries are like this.

However, are cemeteries really peaceful places? Despite the green meadows and colorful flowers, people with a lack of peace come to those places. The nature of what a cemetery is troubles their hearts. How many

people haven't come to Tahoma National Cemetery or their own hometown's cemetery with tears in their eyes, pain in their heart, and deep grief? How can anyone visit a cemetery and feel peace? Perhaps some of you here today have experienced this contradiction of feelings.

Today as we continue our sermon series called "**From Garden to Glory**," we come to the garden in which the tomb of Christ had been cut out of the rock. We come to his cemetery. Yet the title given to this garden is "The Garden of Peace." How can this be so? Let's learn about this garden from John 19 this morning.

1. **A lack of peace?**

We read, "*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.*"

Does this seem like a Garden of Peace? It certainly seems like there is a lack of peace! There certainly had been a lack of peace in the 24 hours that had led up to this time. Conflict in the Garden of Gethsemane. Abuse in the court of the high priest. Flogging, blood, and condemnation in the court of Pilate. And then there had been the torturous walk to the cross, under which Jesus had collapsed. At Golgotha – the "place of the skull" – he had been nailed up to suffer and die as a deterrent to all who passed on the road. In agony Christ had bled and died. Appalling things had just happened.

In addition to all that, Christ had suffered the hell of our sins and had been abandoned by his heavenly Father in judgment for them. "Peace" does not describe these scenes!

At the time his body was taken down and laid in the tomb, was there peace for his disciples? As we read these verses we could ask the question, "Where were they?" We know that John was present at the crucifixion, but the rest had long abandoned him. Where were they? And what were their thoughts at this time? Do you think they had thoughts of peace?

What about the women who were his followers? Mark 15 tells us, "*When the centurion, who stood there in front of Jesus, heard his cry and saw how he died, he said, 'Surely this man was the Son of God!' Some women were watching from a distance. Among them were Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James the younger and of Joses, and Salome. In Galilee these women had followed him and cared for his needs. Many other women who had come up with him to Jerusalem were also there.*" What do you think the actions and attitudes of these women were like? What did their voices sound like? What did they talk about? Did they have peace with all this?

Then we come to the two men that we hear about in our text today: Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus. Who were they? And what were their thoughts at that time?

The Gospel of Matthew tells us that Joseph was a "rich man who had himself become a disciple of Jesus." Mark's gospel tells us that he was "a prominent member of the Council (this was the Sanhedrin, the Jewish religious court, who had condemned Jesus to death) who was himself waiting for the kingdom of God." Luke's gospel tells us he "had not consented to their decision and action." What were Joseph's thoughts at that time? He had spoken up against what the Sanhedrin had done. He had not agreed with their actions, for he believed Christ was the Messiah sent from God!

I'd imagine quite a few tears were shed by Joseph as he saw with regret the fruits of the plotting and trial that his Council had carried out. His innocent Savior now hung dead. We see his faith in the way he provided for Jesus at his burial. It was a place not far from the crucifixion. A garden was there, and Joseph

owned a tomb in that place that had been cut out of the rock. The picture on the screen up front is of the "garden tomb," discovered in the 1800's outside Jerusalem. We don't know for certain that it is Christ's tomb, but the possibility does exist. No one had ever been laid in Joseph's tomb. He honorably gave this tomb to his Savior. Yet I don't think he felt peace as he did it.

Then there was Nicodemus. He reappears on the scene after coming to Jesus at night in John 3, asking who exactly he was since he could do these miraculous signs. He was a Pharisee and a member of the Sanhedrin also. His reappearance at this time speaks volumes about his thoughts about Christ. But did he have thoughts of peace that day?

Can you imagine the job they had of securing Jesus' body from the cross where he died to the place where they laid him? There couldn't have been peace in their minds as they pried Christ from that cross and as they wrapped his body in linen with spices. To magnify their thoughts, they needed to get this done quickly. From the time Jesus died until the Sabbath started was three hours! They had to get permission to have the body and carry out their sad duty of laying it to rest.

What were their expectations as they laid Christ to rest? We see it in 75 pounds of myrrh and aloes that they used for the body. A king's burial! It does not seem that they felt that body would be going anywhere. Couple that with the rock that they rolled in front of the tomb, and we see that their peaceful hopes had been dashed to pieces.

What about you? Do you have peace as you hear these accounts from Scripture? These are disturbing scenes to us. The scenes of Christ's death and burial are so disturbing I've had many friends tell me they have a hard time watching movies that depict this. It's difficult and disturbing to see what happened to Christ. When we add to the grisly scenes the fact that our sins caused his situation, it creates an atmosphere that is far from peaceful. This should not be the Garden of Peace!

2. Real peace!

But it is.

How can this be the Garden of Peace? **First, it certainly was a garden of peace for Jesus.** After the abuse, the accusations, the ropes, the whips, and the cross, he was now at peace. The mocking passers-by were now gone. The gaping crowds and shell-shocked soldiers who witnessed his death and the earthquake that followed had gone their way. Now, with his spirit safely entrusted to his Father, he would take no more abuse.

But the peace runs much deeper than that. Romans 5 tells us very simply, *“We have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ” (5:1).*

One of the more familiar sections of Scripture recounted during Lent is the description that the prophet Isaiah penned in chapter 53: *“Surely he took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows, yet we considered him stricken by God, smitten by him, and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed. We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all.”* That certainly describes the conflict and abuse that our suffering Savior would have to endure for our sins. Yet as we hear the words about the garden in which Jesus was laid long ago, that conflict was over. **Sin had been paid for. Salvation was accomplished. Peace now existed between God and mankind!**

This peace was so vividly illustrated by God in the curtain in the Temple when Jesus died. That curtain that had shielded the Most Holy Place of the Temple where the ark of the covenant had once resided was torn from top to bottom. Why? Because peace had been reestablished between God and mankind! When Jesus said, “It is finished,” the price of the sin of the world was paid for and peace between God and mankind was a reality again.

We can also reflect on how this peace is for each one of us personally. Think about your life. If someone were to ask you what your life is like, would you say, “It’s peaceful”? There are

many running around our world today who do not live lives of peace. Are you one of them?

Can you give the answer that you have peace in the midst of your busy days and weeks? You certainly can, for you are debt free! What is your credit limit? If you had to pay for an emergency or for some unexpected cost, what is your credit limit? How far could you extend yourself to at least be able to cover a cost that you would have to pay off for months and years ahead? Now imagine that you had to pay for your sin and wickedness with your credit limit. How far could you go in repaying the Almighty God for your sins? Not even close. No credit limit of any human being that has ever lived could swallow the cost of their sin and guilt. But today? Have peace! **For you are at peace with God in heaven because of what has been accomplished as we stand in the Garden of Peace and see our Savior’s body laid to rest.** Your life may be filled with activities, busy-ness, and stress, but underlying all of that you have peace. Your life can be the eye of a hurricane that has all sorts of chaos around it, but inside has the quiet peace of knowing about your forgiveness that Christ has won and the fact that he will lead you through life.

Finally, this peace that we see in this garden today will give peace to each of us at our own cemetery. That’s where you are headed, after all. Unless our Lord Jesus returns first, you are headed to a grave in a cemetery or mausoleum somewhere. What does the word of our God of peace say about that?

- *“Precious in the sight of the LORD is the death of his saints” (Psalm 116:15)*
- *“I heard a voice from heaven say, ‘Write: Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on.’ ‘Yes,’ says the Spirit, ‘they will rest from their labor, for their deeds will follow them.’ (Revelation 14:13)*

We can “rest in peace.”

So whenever you drive by or enter a beautiful spot of land that is now a cemetery, remember your peace. Such places can seem to

be contradictions with the beautiful setting and the feelings of those who go there. But this Garden of Peace that we stand in today gives us the proper perspective of such places.

Through Christ's Garden of Peace we have peace! Amen.