

## The Garden of Glory

### Matthew 28:1-10

*After the Sabbath, at dawn on the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to look at the tomb. <sup>2</sup> There was a violent earthquake, for an angel of the Lord came down from heaven and, going to the tomb, rolled back the stone and sat on it. <sup>3</sup> His appearance was like lightning, and his clothes were white as snow. <sup>4</sup> The guards were so afraid of him that they shook and became like dead men. <sup>5</sup> The angel said to the women, "Do not be afraid, for I know that you are looking for Jesus, who was crucified. <sup>6</sup> He is not here; he has risen, just as he said. Come and see the place where he lay. <sup>7</sup> Then go quickly and tell his disciples: 'He has risen from the dead and is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him.' Now I have told you." <sup>8</sup> So the women hurried away from the tomb, afraid yet filled with joy, and ran to tell his disciples. <sup>9</sup> Suddenly Jesus met them. "Greetings," he said. They came to him, clasped his feet and worshiped him. <sup>10</sup> Then Jesus said to them, "Do not be afraid. Go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me."*

I think we all have a place that we visited, or a special place that we have discovered or found that we loved to remember and even suggest to other people. Maybe we stumbled upon this special place during a vacation, maybe it is even a place we now frequent like a favorite restaurant, novelty shop, or some memorable resort or destination. Since we have been talking so much about gardens during these last few weeks of Lent I am going to talk about a series of gardens that we discovered on a family vacation to Missouri last year.

Last summer we took a vacation to Branson, Missouri. One day during the trip the wife and I were looking for a nice place to take the kids and enjoy a picnic in the park and a peaceful setting. We were able to find a wonderful little park just outside the city Springfield, MO. It was filled with different kinds of gardens. So we stopped in and unloaded the kids and the supplies and we enjoyed ourselves in this wonderful little place. A winding path took us on a pleasant little stroll past different kinds of flowers gardens. We stopped and happily entered a gated hosta garden and wandered through its peaceful paths. We had a picnic under the shade of a cool canopy of trees. And then after visiting a few more varying arrangements and interesting mazes of plants and bushes and flowers we ended up at a garden with a shelter filled with beautiful butterflies. It was such a nice little place and we

remember it with such fondness that we have talked about going back and we have even recommended the spot to others.

I think most of us have these little places like this. Places that we love to think about, that we are excited to recall and to recommend. Today is very much the same, but much, much, better. Today we revisit that garden of glory, that garden that will forever be known for its empty tomb. We are told that Jesus was buried in a garden tomb, but today we are not so interested in blooming flower bulbs or different arrangements of bushes and shrubs, but today we look with amazement at the incredible sight that is described. We rejoice and are filled with gladness and joy as we hear the brilliant news that is proclaimed by the angel who beams forth with brilliant light. He is not here! He has risen, just as he said!

What a story these women must have had to tell about their visit to this garden. It started with such sorrow and ended with such triumphant joy. As they headed to Jesus' grave to offer their mournful service they were anxious. Due to the Sabbath they had to wait a whole day to pay their respects and to wrap their friend in cloth and spices and care for this one that they loved. They were sad. They were anxious. Their Jesus was gone. Their Jesus was dead. Even though they had each other they felt alone. The center pillar that had brought them all together had crumpled in heap as his lifeless body was taken off the cross and laid in the grave. And so they needed something to distract them from their sadness, they needed each other in their loneliness, and so as soon as the day dawned they were on their way. They went expecting to visit a silent and gloomy location, but instead they found a place bursting forth with dazzling joy and light and life.

Coming to the tomb there was a violent earthquake for an angel of the Lord came down from heaven and going to the tomb he rolled the stone away from the entrance and he sat on it. Those who had been placed as guards at the tomb to keep Jesus' disciples from stealing the body were stricken powerless by the appearance of this mighty messenger of God. The guards could do nothing to keep Jesus in the tomb, in fact, he was already gone. The angel did not come in this brilliant display as some elaborate distraction so that the body could be stolen and taken from the tomb. He did not even come to move the stone and let Jesus out. But this heavenly messenger of God came to proclaim the good news that Jesus had risen from the dead. He rolled the stone away, sat on that rock, and beamed with brilliant light beckoning everyone to come and see what the mighty God had done. Jesus had defeated sin and death and hell and now had risen triumphant from the grave. Our Redeemer lives!

As these professional soldiers shook at this brilliant sight they were paralyzed with fear. But the mighty messenger of God, the angel, who struck such fear into the hearts of these soldiers, spoke remarkably gentle words of comfort and encouragement to the women who approached. ***“Do not be afraid, for I know that you are looking for Jesus, who was crucified. <sup>6</sup> He is not here; he has risen, just as he said. Come and see the place where he lay.*** This angel, this mighty messenger of

God, whose appearance was as bright and brilliant as lightning, spoke words that were so down to earth and so gentle. ***“Do not be afraid,”*** he said to the women. He clearly recognized their love for Jesus. ***“I know that you are looking for Jesus who was crucified.”*** And then he gave them reason to rejoice and assured them that this was just as God had planned. ***“He is not here, he is risen.”*** Remember that’s what he told you. And then the angel invited the women to visit the empty tomb to take in this remarkable sight for themselves.

Today, a few days after we sat in the darkness of Good Friday and we remembered that our Savior died such a horrible death for our sins, we are given this same gentle yet glorious invitation. Don’t be afraid. Come and see the place where he lay. Come and visit this beautiful garden which is such a wonderful place of peace and wonder and joy. Come and see where something so remarkable has happened. It is a place bursting forth with light and strength and happiness. See what your God has done! It is the sweet sentence that all of Scripture points to: Our Redeemer lives!

Imagine the joy these women had when they went in, when they saw the place where their Lord used to lie. Imagine how their deep sorrow turned into such indescribable joy. Imagine how their hearts and hands and feet so heavy with sadness suddenly became so light and swift because of the joy and wonder that filled their hearts. Imagine how they just erupted with gladness when they were greeted warmly by their Savior himself. ***“Greetings!”*** Literally he said to them, ***“Be glad!”*** And they were. Even though there was no way they could logically process all of this, they responded with simple faith and fell at his feet and worshipped him. With hearts filled with joy they embraced their Savior and were renewed in the joy of the moment. They were encouraged and strengthened and made glad; and then Jesus sent them on their way to spread the good news.

Today their joy is our joy. This is this wonderful place that we have been shown. This is the beautiful garden that we are able to come and visit each year. We come and revisit his wonderful place, and gladly recall this wonder event. And we are refreshed and renewed and filled once again with wonder and joy. Today we are able to approach our Savior in confidence and gladness as his warm greeting meets our hearts which are made happy. ***“Don’t be afraid.”***

Yes, our sins caused him to suffer. Our many transgressions sent him to the cross. Our innumerable iniquities caused him to die in our place; but he does not hold our sins against us and we are once again reassured that his work of salvation is done. He did this for us. He was delivered over to death for our sins and raised to life to assure us that we are not guilty. And so he comes to us with greetings of warm encouragement and love. Do not be afraid. The tomb is empty. Our Redeemer lives!

The angel wrapped in beaming light assures us that everything is just as Jesus said. He lives! Our sins have been paid for and God is more than pleased with the payment. We are not just distracted from our sorrow, but our sorrow and our guilt is taken away and we are given joy. We are surely not alone but our Savior, our friend,

the one who brings us together, he lives. And so we are able to stand together as a family of believers and we have the one who is our center. Jesus is the living one, our living head, who connects us, and upholds us, and sustains us, and gives us life. The Son rises from the dead and we can know with full assurance that we are forgiven, that we are restored with God the Father, and we are loved.

Notice how warmly Jesus addressed the women and then spoke of the disciples as his brothers. Through faith in Jesus our risen Lord we are at one with the God the Father. Jesus became one of us, and now the Father is pleased with us because of the life and death of our dear brother. God is pleased and raises our Redeemer from the dead and sends his angel to proclaim this good news for us to hear. And then in gentleness and concern the Son of God comes to us through his words today and meets us with warm greetings of love. He says to you "Do not be afraid". And we are also reminded of the many truths of scripture that speak to our hearts and confirmed in the unforgettable events of this first Easter. We remember that Jesus promised, "Because I live you will live." We know from God's Word that our sins are forgiven. You know from God's promises that one day you will see Jesus in heaven. He has gone ahead of us to that glorious garden of paradise that we call heaven and one day he will bring us safely there. With thankful hearts we bow low at his feet, we take in his precious words, and we are glad.

Today we have come again to this place that we have learned to love so much. We come to this beautiful garden and we fill this house of God with the brilliant sight of blooming flowers, and bright colors. We proclaim his name as our voices burst forth in song and testify of the joy that fills our hearts. We encourage each other with these wonderful words, this brilliant message. He lives!

We are renewed and refreshed as we remember with great fondness what happened in this garden of glory. We embrace our living Savior and fall at his feet and worship him. And then refreshed and filled with courage and love, happiness and joy, we are sent on our way. Go and tell the brothers! Your Savior has refreshed you and has given you courage so that you might do his work. Dear brothers and sisters don't be afraid. Instead be filled with hope and courage and joy. Go out and encourage those who belong to this family of believers who have been absent from worship. Tell your neighbors and friends and your family of this wonderful place that has been shown to you. Speak to your children about the joy and happiness that they have in Christ Jesus. Speak of the good news of the empty tomb often and gently invite others to come and visit this place of forgiveness and victory, peace and glory.

This is the good news that bursts forth from this empty garden tomb. Jesus lived and died and rose again for us all. Recall the glory of this garden, come back often and remember with great fondness these life changing events, and recommend this beautiful place to others. Praise be to our living Lord for this unforgettable Garden of Glory! Amen.