

# Pastor Kory's Page

Faith Lutheran Church, Sioux Falls, SD

April 2 & 3, 2016

## “Paradise Cemetery”

Isn't it amazing that the glorious events of Easter morning began in a *cemetery*? Each of the four Gospels describes a group of women trekking to the tomb at dawn on Sunday morning. They had been waiting since Friday afternoon, when Jesus had been hurriedly buried, to be able to return to the tomb and pay their respects in the form of sweet-smelling burial spices.

The day after Good Friday was a Sabbath and all of Jesus' followers would have remained at their lodging to observe the day of rest. I imagine the women's feelings on that Holy Saturday being similar to our feelings after we've lost a loved one—stunned by grief, wondering how we will have the strength to keep going, and awaiting the funeral and burial service when we will gather with other family members and friends to support one another.

The women couldn't wait any longer. The Sabbath was over and the sun was beginning to brighten the eastern sky on that Sunday morning. The group of mourners made their way to the cemetery to say farewell to their beloved Teacher.

Of course, we know the rest of the story! God transformed that dark and sad cemetery into the source of the Greatest News ever told! “*He is not here, but has risen!*” declared the angels (Luke 24:6).

Jesus transformed the garden tomb from a place of death and grief to a place of joy and new life! His tomb was empty—even Jesus' enemies acknowledged the fact (Matt. 28:11-15). But why is *Jesus'* empty tomb Good News for *us*? Because His is the first of *countless* empty tombs!

St. Paul writes, in his “Easter chapter” of 1st Corinthians 15, “*But in fact, Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep*” (15:20). The firstfruits was the earliest portion of a harvest, a sign of the full harvest to come. Christ, the firstfruits, is the first to rise from His empty tomb, but He will *not* be the last! As one of our great Easter hymns puts it, “Jesus is Risen and We Shall Arise!” (LSB 474) and as Jesus Himself promises, “*This is the will of My Father, that everyone who looks on the Son and believes in*

*Him should have eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day*” (John 6:40).

When I think of cemeteries, I think of a particular cemetery among the hills and fields of Randolph County, IL. It's called “Paradise Cemetery.” This might sound like a surprising name for a cemetery, a place of such loss and sadness, as it was when my grandparents and great-grandparents were buried there. Paradise Cemetery doesn't fit our usual picture of paradise—there are almost no trees; it's situated along a busy road; and it's all very plain—no historic monuments or mausoleums.

Still, when we think about what God did to transform a cemetery outside of Jerusalem by raising His Son from the grave, maybe “Paradise Cemetery” isn't such a bad name after all.

God created mankind to live in paradise, a perfect place where human beings could literally walk with God. But paradise was spoiled and lost through Satan's temptation and Adam and Eve's sin. However, on the day that Jesus rose from the dead, the restoration of paradise began. Jesus' resurrection isn't just Good News for *Him*—it's Good News for the entire *world*!

Luther explains the Apostles' Creed, “On the Last Day He will raise me and all the dead, and give eternal life to me and all believers in Christ.” Easter whets our appetite for the Last Day and for the full and final restoration of paradise on earth—a New Creation filled with God's raised & restored children.

When *you* think about cemeteries, you might think of places like Hills of Rest, or Woodlawn, or Mt. Pleasant. You probably think of specific places in those or other cemeteries where your loved ones are laid to rest.

But know this: the Good News of Easter points us ahead to a Day when every cemetery, every place of rest, will be transformed. Every grave will be opened, every knee will bow before the Risen Lord Jesus, and every believer in Jesus will walk with Him forever, in paradise.

Alleluia! Christ is Risen!

In Him,

Pastor Kory Janneke

**P.S. – Please see the reverse side to learn more about Rev. Adam DeGroot and how you can support his mission work in Philadelphia.**