

4/18/25 Good Friday The Tomb in the Garden *John 19:28-30, 38-42*
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Hello everyone, I am so glad to see each of you here today, and welcome to those who are with us online. My name is Gwyneth Preu and I work here at Brewster Baptist as the Family Ministry Coordinator. I am honored to share the Good Friday message with you today, as we recognize such an important day in the life of Christ and the Christian faith. For Lent, BBC has been going through a series called The Gardens of God, which has highlighted different gardens in the Bible. We started with the Garden of Eden and have worked our way to the Tomb in the Garden, which we will talk about today.

Why do gardens capture our imagination, both in person and when we visit or read about them? Some people really love to participate in the actual act of gardening — planting, watering, weeding, and watching things grow. Is anyone a true gardener who loves that process? My oldest daughter is already an avid gardener and gets so much joy out of thinking about plants and seeds — all the way to harvesting her grown vegetables and flowers. She has been lucky to be a part of the Brewster Children’s Garden on Lower Road, which has encouraged her interest and taught her many new things that I wouldn’t be able to teach her. In this picture, you can see her working in her plot, growing a mix of flowers and vegetables. Some of us, including me, are more garden appreciators — we love to go to gardens and be amazed by the work of professionals. Any other garden appreciators here today? One that our family has visited several times is the Coastal Maine Botanical Gardens in Boothbay Harbor. They have an incredible mix of flowers, art, family-friendly displays, and opportunities to learn — highly recommended if you get a chance to go.

One thing about a garden is how it can represent new life and hope after a dark season. Last month, I got to see the play “The Secret Garden” at the Academy Playhouse in Orleans, and it prompted me to read the book out loud to my kids. I’m sure many of you are familiar with the story. The book “The Secret Garden” focuses on how the discovery and growth of a garden helps two children, named Mary and Colin, become more healthy, joyful, and connected to their family. As you can see from the cover, the

book has many pages of imagery of the garden, using descriptive phrases like “fountains of roses” that make you want to be in that secret garden with them.

An interesting thing about living in New England is how Easter tends to fall right as we are starting to see signs of spring! It feels like a perfect match of going through the darker season of Lent in the church during the winter, as we wait for the resurrection, and also wait anxiously for spring, as we look for signs of color and growth. It has been encouraging to see daffodils, crocuses, and forsythia starting to bloom around the Cape and helping us anticipate warmer days. As we think about all the imagery and beauty of gardens, we will read about the Tomb in the Garden today.

We will continue to read from *John 19* starting with verses 28-30: “Later, knowing that everything had now been finished, and so that Scripture would be fulfilled, Jesus said, ‘I am thirsty.’ A jar of wine vinegar was there, so they soaked a sponge in it, put the sponge on a stalk of the hyssop plant, and lifted it to Jesus’ lips. When he had received the drink, Jesus said, ‘It is finished.’ With that, he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.

Now we will move to verses 30-42: “Later, Joseph of Arimathea asked Pilate for the body of Jesus. Now Joseph was a disciple of Jesus, but secretly because he feared the Jewish leaders. 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.” This is the Word of God for us on this Good Friday.

The scripture passage of *John 19* mentions many different people who were present at Jesus’ crucifixion. Most importantly on this day was the presence of Jesus, who is the central figure of Good Friday. Also present at the cross were Roman soldiers who were overseeing Jesus’ crucifixion. There were two criminals being punished and crucified alongside Jesus. There were, most likely, onlookers who were coming and going from Jerusalem. The scripture passage talks about Jesus’ mother, Mary, being present, along with other women, including Mary Magdalene. There is the “disciple

whom Jesus loved”, who was, most likely, John. There were the Jewish leaders, who had pushed for Jesus to be punished for calling himself the Son of God. After the death of Jesus, we meet Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus, who bury Jesus in a nearby tomb. It was a pretty mixed group of people gathered at the cross — some people there wanted Jesus to die and others were watching someone they loved suffer. It was not a comfortable environment for everyone there, especially for the followers of Jesus, who were also being threatened. I want to focus on three of the people who were at the cross — Jesus; Mary, the mother of Jesus; and Joseph of Arimathea.

1. Jesus — **The defining aspect of Good Friday is the sacrificial love of Jesus.** This was a culmination of his life on earth and what God the Father had sent him to do. One of the phrases Jesus utters on the cross is, “Father forgive them for they know not what they do” in *Luke 23:34*. What an amazing phrase for Jesus to say as he is suffering beyond belief on the cross, and people are mocking him. He is asking God to forgive people as they actively harm him. As humans, we can struggle to forgive hurts from years ago, while Jesus is forgiving in his moment of pain. Jesus is truly living out the idea of sacrificial love, in both body and spirit, as he suffers on the cross.
2. Mary — As a mother, my heart just aches for Mary on this day. She has been through so much, and now has the pain of watching Jesus suffer. Mary was there at the beginning of Jesus’ story with his conception and birth. We hear a lot about Mary at Christmastime and her incredible faith. Then, here she is at the cross — older, wiser, most likely widowed, and she is about to see her son die. In *Luke 2:34-35*, Mary is told by the prophet, Simeon, “*This child is destined to cause the falling and rising of many in Israel... And a sword will pierce your own soul, too.*” Perhaps, Mary remembered those words as she watched her son suffer on the cross. It seems to be a very fitting description that her very soul was pierced as she witnessed her beloved son being crucified. She had other women with her to support her, and the disciple, John, but the pain she must have felt would have been enormous.
3. Joseph of Arimathea — Joseph of Arimathea makes a short, but meaningful, appearance in all four gospels. This Joseph is not the Joseph who was the earthly father of Jesus, or the Joseph from the Old Testament who was sold into slavery

to the Egyptians. All we know about Joseph of Arimathea exists in these passages directly after the crucifixion of Jesus. From reading these different accounts, we learn that he had been a secret believer, who approached Pilate about taking Jesus off the cross and bringing him to a nearby grave that he owned. A few things are remarkable about this — Joseph of Arimathea was most likely a wealthy, powerful man; he was called a leader, and had the standing to approach Pilate directly. He was rich enough to own a grave, where Jesus was eventually buried. For him to make his faith in Jesus known during Jesus' crucifixion, when people were turned against his disciples, was a bold and brave move. People were likely shocked by this, and he may have lost standing and power in the community. Also, to handle a dead body made him unclean for seven days, so he could not participate in much of daily life — including the important religious holiday of the Passover, which was just beginning. There was no advantage for Joseph to proclaim his faith at this juncture, and there was a lot for him to lose.

We are going to share an image titled “Joseph of Arimathea brings Jesus down from the cross”, which is by an artist from the 1800s named Gustave Dore. Obviously, this is an artist's rendering, and, most likely, there would have been more people and more blood at this moment, but it captures the three people I've talked about today — Jesus; his mother, Mary; and Joseph of Arimathea. This next image shows Jesus being carried into the tomb by the same people, and while they carry Jesus, it shows their grief and determination to give him a proper burial. They would have walked through the gardens to bring him to this tomb that was prepared for him.

We know that gardens do not come fully formed. To see growth and fruitfulness, there has to be a seed growing in the dark, then sunshine and water, then a sprout that needs tending and protection, before a full bloom. The three people we talked about were at different stages in their faith and growth. Jesus was fully obedient to God on Good Friday, taking on the sacrifice of extreme suffering. Even in the midst of this suffering, he is still thinking of others — when he asks John to care for his mother, and when he asks God to “forgive them for they know not what they do”. Jesus had reached his full potential and was bearing fruit for all of humanity on this day. Mary, Jesus' mother, was suffering by watching her son die right in front of her. Jesus knew that his mother was at a stage where she needed tending and care — both practically, because he

was leaving her, and emotionally, as she went through such a difficult event. Joseph of Arimathea was a secret believer before Christ's crucifixion; his seed of faith was in the dark until he went to Pilate and asked for Jesus' body. Then his faith came out of the dark, and started to sprout, as he took Jesus down from the cross and took him to the garden tomb. This courageous move helped his faith to grow, and he was remembered in the Bible for this brave act.

What can we learn from the different people at the cross of Christ? If we are at a mature place in our faith where we can see the fruit of knowing God, then we should be searching out ways we can imitate Christ, by serving and sacrificing for others and being aware of who needs care. If we are at a place of hurt, like Mary, as we, or someone we love, suffers, we tend our souls by seeking community, accepting help, and coming before God to ask our hard questions. We should strive to seek God more, and bring our hurt to him, instead of turning away from Him during difficult times. And what if, like Joseph, our seed of faith is still in the dark? What if we believe, but are afraid to share that with others? There are small and courageous steps we can take to grow that seed of faith. Those steps could include opening our Bible and praying for guidance, talking to a friend or family member about God, or starting to serve at church in some way, or joining a small group. We can all be at these different stages of growth during different times of our life. For us to grow our seed of faith, we need to take steps to take in the light of God, and plant ourselves in good soil.

We can feel like we are in the dark, or we may need tending, or we are in full bloom — and the garden of God has room for each seed, each person, and every stage of faith.

As we think about Jesus in the Tomb of the Garden this Good Friday, **let God find you in His garden of faith, where he provides growth, hope and light for us.**

After I pray to close this sermon, we will hear and sing the song “Were You There?”, which reflects on being present at the cross. This will be followed by 2-3 minutes of silence. We will show the image of Christ coming down from the cross during this time of silence. As we pray, sing, and have silence, reflect on Christ's sacrifice and how your faith can continue to grow in God's garden.

Please pray with me: God, thank you for growing us in your garden of faith. Help us to seek you, whatever stage we are at — if we are a seed in the dark, if we need tending, or when we are ready to serve you fully. Thank you for the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross, and help us to honor this by loving and sacrificing for you. Amen

Benediction: May you go out with the knowledge of Christ's sacrifice on this Good Friday, and the desire to grow your seed of faith. Look to Jesus for hope, for tending, and as an example, and may we grow in his light. Amen