

Graves to Gardens

*"You have turned for me my mourning into dancing;
you have loosed my sackcloth and clothed me with gladness,"*

Psalms 30:11 ESV

When we come alive by knowing Jesus, we realize that Easter is more than baskets of dyed eggs, chocolate bunnies, and Peeps. We celebrated before, but not for what Easter was truly all about. But now, for followers of Jesus, this is a life-giving week, and an important time. Graves into gardens - that's what it's about. It's about bringing things that are dead back to life.

Video (Excerpt)

Luke 1:37 NKJV

"For with God nothing will be impossible."

That's the way God is. Nothing is impossible with Him. He's always renewing - always able to take what was meant for evil and turn it for good - to take our graves and turn them into gardens. Why? Because He never gives up on His plan. He has never given up on us. He knows what we don't - that you can't experience resurrection life without death. Jesus - He died so we can have lives of purpose and power over the grave. He is not dead. HE IS ALIVE - and because He lives, we can live again.

We've all read about Humpty Dumpty who sat on a wall - he had a great fall, and all the king's horses and all the king's men couldn't put Humpty Dumpty back together again. But, here's the Good News - we have One who *can* put Humpty Dumpty back together again. *Graves into gardens* - death into Life - our mourning into dancing - he turns it. God loves broken things. Some of us here today feel pretty broken these days. Things are not going great - life did not turn out like we pictured it (most of us would say that!).

A line from a recent song says, *"What we see broken, God sees mended."* There's an interesting art form in Japan called Kintsugi, which is described as a traditional art form that involves repairing broken ceramics or pottery with lacquer mixed with gold dust. This technique is based on the principle of Wabi Sabi, which emphasizes and acknowledges the flaws in things, and embraces the imperfections.

Kintsugi fills the cracks and broken parts with gold or silver, making the repaired piece even more beautiful than before - instead of hiding or discarding the broken ceramics, Kintsugi celebrates their history, and transforms them into art. That sounds a little bit like Jesus.

Some of us have a lot more going on behind our faces, and if we could see each other in 3-D, we would see some cracks, flaws, and imperfections. If we buy a new car, the first ding we get is always the most noticeable - *and depressing!* Our “new car” no longer looks new because it now has a flaw. If we just leave it alone and don’t worry about it, we’ll still see it, but it can remind us that God loves flawed and broken things - and just maybe, we should too.

Not all Bible characters were perfect like their flannel-graph renderings. They actually had a lot of flaws. *Where we see broken - God sees mended and beautiful.* Some of us were in church Sunday because we were “guilted” into going by a loved one. Others went because they genuinely wanted to be there, but they didn’t feel *worthy* to be there, because they believed their own imperfections stood out more than anybody else’s. Like we’re the only one who’s flawed in the world - but we’re not.

One Bible character who had some flaws and issues was Peter, who was a go-big-or-go-home kind of guy. He came out of a rough background. He was a fisherman of the first century - a rough old boy. Fishermen back then had a grueling daily work routine that was repeated their whole lives - hard work and a hard way to make a living. The fishermen were rough around the edges and probably would’ve been great in a reality T.V. show today.

Peter was a classic fisherman. In the Bible narrative of what we call Easter Sunday, Jesus had been discovered missing. He was crucified on Friday between two thieves who died with him, then he was placed in a borrowed tomb. The disciples were in mourning and grief because they were trying to figure out, “*What do we do now?*” They thought he was going to overthrow the Romans who had brought down their hammer of oppression, taxation, and horrific leadership over their nation.

They thought Jesus the Messiah was going to eradicate all of that - and now he’s dead - in a *tomb* - with a *big rock* in front of it - and Roman guards standing watch. Then two of the women, Mary Magdalene (also imperfect with a checkered past) and Mary, Lazarus’ sister, came to the tomb with preserving spices for Jesus’ body. They came on the first day of the week, only to find no guards - the rock had been rolled back, and they went inside and Jesus was *gone*.

Imagine their emotions - they were real people, who, in their grief and mourning, were going to prepare Jesus' body for burial - and he's *gone*. The Bible says the women bowed to the ground and then two angels showed up suddenly and said, *"Why do you seek for the living among the dead? He is not here - He is risen. Go back and tell His disciples."* The first human beings to receive the greatest announcement - the proof of his resurrection - were two women, one of whom was very broken and flawed. *We see broken - God sees mended - he sees beautiful.*

The women took the news back to share it with the disciples, who didn't believe them and promptly slammed the door on them. Jesus indeed had been raised from the dead. When he had been arrested in the garden, the disciples scattered like cockroaches.

John 18:15-18 NIV

"Simon Peter and another disciple were following Jesus. Because this disciple was known to the high priest, he went with Jesus into the high priest's courtyard, but Peter had to wait outside at the door. The other disciple, who was known to the high priest, came back, spoke to the servant girl on duty there and brought Peter in. 'You aren't one of this man's disciples too, are you?' she asked Peter. He replied, 'I am not.' It was cold, and the servants and officials stood around a fire they had made to keep warm. Peter also was standing with them, warming himself."

Jesus had told Peter that he would deny him three times before the rooster crowed. Peter denied the One that he had lived with, walked with, learned from, cried with, and who he had seen perform miracles for over three years. When the rooster crowed, Peter realized what he had done - exactly what Jesus had said. If Peter could deny Jesus after seeing everything that he did, we can too. Sometimes we deny him - maybe not with our words, but with our actions - or even with our *silence*.

So, we can't judge Peter, we can only identify with him in his ignorance and fear of the moment, where it didn't look like Jesus was winning, and it was in that moment that Peter denied him. By his association with Jesus, Peter could have gone to prison with him too, since the Romans and the Sanhedrin were taking people down left and right.

There is beauty in the things that happened next - Jesus was crucified, raised from the dead, then he appeared to the disciples in the upper room, and sent them to Jerusalem to wait. But, Peter and the other disciples went back to fishing - the thing that they knew. They probably were thinking, *"Now what?"* when they saw Jesus walking along the shore (but not recognizing him), and then saw him cooking a meal for them.

After this incredible reunion, Jesus said to Peter three times, *"Do you love me? Feed my sheep."* Then Jesus closed the loop on Peter's heart and brokenness and laced lacquer with gold and put Peter back together again (Kintsugi), and says, *"Follow Me."* After all of that, including his denial, Jesus saw *mended*, and Jesus' heart for Peter was to mend him and put him back together again.

The Good News for *us* is that he will put *us* back together again. Most times, if we break something, we just scoop it up and throw it away as dumpster bait - but not Jesus - he takes the shards of our lives - what we offer him - our mess - and he says, *"I can work with that."* He can work with broken pieces - he can work with *us* - *we're* broken - if we've received a bad diagnosis from a doctor or therapist, or our peers or parents, *or from a church*.

They may see broken, and *we* may see broken, but *God* sees *mended* - God sees *beautiful* - and he will put us back together again. The glory of that is way beyond where we started from. A bowl or piece of pottery is beautiful when it's clean and fresh, but when it's laced with *gold* - it becomes *art* - and God's creating *art* here - with *you*.

Romans 8:1 NIV

"Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus..."

Some of us think we're not good enough and that God can't fix our broken places, but there is no judgement nor condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus - we just need to get *in Christ* - take a step and say, *"I choose to believe, and I'm going to receive, and now I'm going to become what God says I am - a child of God."*

2 Corinthians 12:9 NIV

"But he said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect [whole] in weakness.' Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me."

There is no condemnation - his grace is enough for *you*. He can make *art* out of your broken shards.

Ephesians 2:8-10 NIV

"For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith-and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God - not by works, so that no one can boast. For we are God's handiwork [God's masterpiece], created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do."

From graves into gardens - from mourning to dancing - from depression to joy - broken to whole - shards to art. That's what God wants to do in your life. That's what he's offering to you today - the chance to take a step down that path.

Take the first step

Sometimes we need to put a stake in the ground for a new season - a new beginning - and let him continue the work of lacing our brokenness with gold and lacquer - creating this work of art. Let him finish the job. It's no accident that we're here today - God wanted you to hear this message about broken things so you could have hope ...and so he could heal them.

Prayer

Dear Lord Jesus, we're turning to You, and we're turning our backs on our own ways. We choose to receive from You Your free gift of mercy, grace, forgiveness, and healing. We give You our past, our present, and our future - we give You our all. Thank You for mending our broken lives and for making us whole in Christ.

Come into my heart, Lord. Fill me and heal me. Save me. In Jesus' name. Amen