

Sunday, April 16, 2017

Forest Hills United Methodist Church

Broad Series: Grounded (The life of Jesus in four parts, Exploring Jesus as the incarnation of God in the created world, and how that gives salvation an earth grounding.)

Series Part 3: Dirty Faith: Jesus' Passion

Sermon #6: "Sunday: Grounded in an Empty Hole"

Rev. Dr. David Werner

Scripture: Matthew 28:1-10

Text: "Suddenly Jesus met them and greeted them. They came and grabbed His feet and worshipped Him." Matthew 28:9

Sermon Blurb: Easter changes everything! This is why Jesus came. Our God brought to us the power over dirt, the dirt that covers us in sin, and the dirt that covers our graves. On Easter, Jesus rose from the dead and busted open the power of death. We celebrate life abundant now grounded on earth and eternally grounded in Jesus. Our faith is grounded in an empty hole!

Gathering Song: *Christ the Lord Is Risen Today*

Gathering: Pastor David

Garbage bag hill of Golgatha

Empty cross - Jesus' death paid for our sin, and earned us forgiveness

Yet we still are stuck in the power of sin's consequences: death!

Video: *He Arose* (\$18) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XbS-34SIHCA>

Worship Set: Sanctify

Alleluia, Alleluia

This Is Amazing Grace

Thine Be the Glory

Worship Prayer - Andrew

Kids invited to Kids' Church

Easter Prayers - Andrew

Offering: *What Wondrous Love Is This* - Easter Ensemble

Sermon Bumper

Message: "Sunday: Grounded in an Empty Hole"

PP#1: Dirty Faith: Jesus' Passion

Sunday: Grounded in an Empty Hole

"Suddenly Jesus met them and greeted them. They came and grabbed His feet and worshipped Him." Matthew 28:9

Sunday: Grounded in an Empty Hole. Matthew 28:9 "Suddenly Jesus met them and greeted them. They came and grabbed His feet and worshipped Him."

PP#2: *A festive image of SURPRISE!*

Do you like surprises?

Now, I know it can depend on what the surprise is. But in general, do you like new stuff hitting you, or do you want to see it coming, first?

I was watching some videos of people walking into a surprise party for them. Some smiled and nervously looked around. Some got all into it, starting clapping and jumping, and high-fiving people. Some screamed and jumped back, or ran back out the door. One lady—I kid you not—hailed off and clobbered her husband who happened to be closest to her. “Don’t you ever do that to me!” she screamed.

There are two kinds of people, I think. The kind who love the adventure that each moment can bring, the kind who eagerly hope for the unexpected, who embrace the new, and feel excited about different possibilities.

And then there are all the rest of us, the 90%! We want to see what’s coming. We want to prepare. Get ready. Surprise means being caught off guard, and we don’t know what to think about it yet. I’m a control freak. Surprises are unmanageable. I need time to process. Whenever my wife asks me, “Do you want me to tell you the surprise, or do you want to just find out?” I always want to be warned...I mean, told, ahead of time. It’s my opinion that most people like to see others get surprised, but don’t themselves like to be surprised.

Well, like I said, it has a lot to do with what kind of surprise it is. Most of us who are cautious of surprises have experienced too many surprises that have not gone well. Surprise! The fridge stopped working. Surprise! I hit a guardrail on the way home, but I was able to bungee the fender to keep driving. Surprise, you’re laid off. Collect your things and be gone in five minutes. Surprise, you have cancer. Or there was the phone call I got yesterday from my sister. Surprise, our uncle Roy died last night. He was the last of my father’s generation, and the last still living on the Werner homestead in Jamestown, North Dakota.

We’ve gotten careful over the years. We’ve gotten a bit wary, even of the good surprises. Surprise, you won \$100. Really? What’s the catch. What do I have to do? I don’t want to buy anything! Surprise, I made steak tonight! What did you do wrong? How much did this cost us? Surprise! We’re pregnant! Wow. That’s really great. ... But this will really change our lives. I don’t know how to be a dad. I’m glad, really ... I think.

Remember when you were a kid? Someone said, “I have a surprise for you!” You were instantly excited. Oooo! No worries. Just fun. And it usually turned out that you got some candy, or finally got to go somewhere you loved, or you got a present.

But most of us, over the years, have worked hard to de-surprise our lives. We plan ahead. We act responsibly. We buy insurance. We have contingency plans.

We want to be in control. We want to navigate our day the way we plan. We feel more secure if what we can see what’s coming, and if we can see what we get.

PP#3: *Image of the guards at the tomb very surprised to see the angel.*

Easter is about surprises. It’s about things happening that were not expected, or controlled, or even by some, wanted. The one uniform reaction among everyone when Jesus rose from the dead, is surprise. Now this may seem strange, especially since Jesus told His disciples a number of times that He was going to die and then be raised from the dead. But the problem with the disciples is that

they had too much experience. They had seen too many people die, and only one be raised again. And the one who was raised, was raised by the one who was now dead. No, no one was expecting Jesus to be raised again.

Let's take a look at the story, from Matthew, chapter 28.

Jesus was arrested early Friday morning. By day break He was on trial. By mid morning, He was on the cross. He died at 3 p.m. and was hastily buried before sundown.

The next day, from Friday evening through Saturday evening, was the Jewish Sabbath. Everyone laid low. And everyone *was* low, down, sad, defeated. Except the Jewish leaders, of course. They were happy.

Then, early Sunday morning, before the sun came up, some women go to the tomb to finish the burial process for Jesus' body.

PP#4: Matthew 28:1-10 (CEB)

1 After the Sabbath, at dawn on the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to look at the tomb. 2 And *suddenly*, there was a violent earthquake, for an angel from the Lord came down from heaven and, going to the tomb, rolled back the stone and sat on it. 3 His appearance was like lightning, and his clothes were as white as snow. 4 The guards were so terrified of him that they shook with fear and became like dead men.

As the sun rose on the horizon, something surprising happened.

Verse 1, "After the Sabbath, at dawn on the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to look at the tomb. And *SUDDENLY* [surprise!], there was a violent earthquake, for an angel from the Lord came down from heaven and, going to the tomb, rolled back the stone and sat on it. His appearance was like lightning, and his clothes were as white as snow. The guards were so terrified of him that they shook with fear and became like dead men."

Ah, those guards didn't like surprises, it seems, did they? At least not this kind. Not what they were expecting, or even believed could happen. They fainted.

Well, what was the angel doing there? He rolled the stone away. Why? To let Jesus *OUT*?

Actually, I don't think so. Jesus, after His resurrection, seems to be able to appear here and there at will, regardless of physical barriers. It never actually says that Jesus came out of the tomb. Maybe He did. I don't know. But I do know that the stone wasn't a problem for Jesus.

I think the angel rolled the stone away in order to let the women *IN*. I mean, he sat there, waiting to talk to them. And he invites them into the tomb.

PP#5: Matthew 28:1-10 (CEB)

5 But the angel said to the women, "Don't be afraid. I know that you are looking for Jesus who was crucified. 6 He isn't here. He's been raised from the dead, just as He said. Come, see the place where they laid Him. 7 Then hurry, go and tell His disciples, 'He's been raised from the dead. He's going on ahead of you to Galilee. You will see Him there.' I've given the message to you."

Verse 5, "But the angel said to the women, '*Don't be afraid*. [See, trying to calm them down from the surprise of it all. Then he says,] I know that you are looking for Jesus who was crucified. [See, what they expect is a dead body. They believe He is dead. Based on all that they know, and have seen, Jesus is dead. But the angel tells them a shocker.] 6 He isn't here. [Surprise!] He's been raised from the dead, just as He said. [Process. Remember. It's not crazy. He explained all this before. I know, it's hard to absorb. Maybe a look would help.] Come, see the place where they laid

Him. 7 Then hurry, go and tell His disciples, ‘He’s been raised from the dead. He’s going on ahead of you to Galilee. You will see Him there.’ I’ve given the message to you.”

The angel’s job is done. He waited for them. Told them the surprise. Then calmed them down. Explained to them the miracle. Invited them to see for themselves, so their brains could catch up with their ears. And then he sent them off to tell others. You’ll get the proof you need. You’ll see Him for yourself.

PP#6: Matthew 28:1-10 (CEB)

8 With great fear and excitement, the women hurried away from the tomb and ran to tell His disciples. 9 Suddenly Jesus met them and greeted them. They came and grabbed His feet and worshipped Him. 10 Then Jesus said to them, “Don’t be afraid. Go and tell my brothers that I am going to Galilee. They will see me there.”

Verse 8, “With great fear and excitement, [Fear? Doesn’t seem like they may be able to handle surprises, either, does it? But they’re starting to get excited.] the women hurried away from the tomb and ran to go tell His disciples. 9 *SUDDENLY* [there’s that word again...surprise!] Jesus met them and greeted them. [Well, by now, they are a bit more prepared. They’re happy-excited!] They came and grabbed His feet and worshipped Him. 10 Then Jesus said to them, “Don’t be afraid. Go and tell my brothers that I am going to Galilee. They will see me there.”

Same message, told again, but this time, by Jesus Himself.

What a surprise! Easter is full of surprises, awesome surprises!

PP#7: *Image of the two Marys worshipping at the risen Jesus’ feet.*

It really changed everything for them. The women started out that day in sadness, despair, in death. Then they met Jesus, alive and well. The burden of death that they carried to the tomb, the sorrow of darkness, is gone. Light is shining! Their sadness and despair, gone. Notice how they walk: they had slowly stumbled in darkness *to* the tomb. But they run light-footed and giddy, *away*. Their excitement, their joy makes them unafraid of whatever may come. Changed.

The disciples are so depressed they don’t even come. They see no hope. But the message the women bring back, brings a dawning of hope to them. And then, when they meet Jesus for themselves later that day, they are changed. Their fear of death is broken. Their belief that their sin can be forgiven is renewed. Their lives are filled with a joy that carries them through all that is to come, and they happily go and share this good news with everyone they can for the rest of their lives. And each die their bodily deaths clinging to Jesus and certain of the eternal life He won for them.

The Jewish leaders start happy and content. They got what they wanted, what they planned. But Easter rocks their world. They are no longer happy. They bribe the guards to lie about it.

Easter is about surprises...for us, too, and it changes us as well. We, who are stuck in our routine, who live by only what we see, or can control, we, who outline our tomorrows ... our lives can be so flat, and empty ... lifeless, and only the way we expect.

But there is more to life than this. There is more than what we know, or plan, or can even imagine.

Suddenly, Jesus appears, to us. Surprise! God breaks in, and things are different. We have a risen savior who comes to us, and changes things. He brings what we cannot see, or expect, or even name.

PP#8: Grounded in an Empty Hole

You know, as a church, we've been walking with this Jesus since Christmas. We've followed Him around, walked in His footsteps. In Him, we see that God, just didn't know; that God just didn't notice us, struggling down here in the dirt; that God just didn't care, and empathize. In Jesus we see a God who comes down to us, on the ground, and walks in the dirt with us. Our God is grounded, right down here, in our lives.

When Jesus dies on the cross, it was dirty business. It was dirty because it really happened: on the ground, in real time and place. It's dirty because Jesus' cross stood in soil. It's dirty because dirty people did nasty things, because the dirt of sin covered us all. It's dirty because they laid His body in the ground, in a hole in the side of a hill.

Winning our forgiveness was dirty business. But Jesus did it all. And by coming down here with us, Jesus cleaned away the dirt of sin, and broke it's power of death.

Jesus promised the women: tell the others, they will see me, back in Galilee, *where they live*.

We have a different life, a different hope, besides just what we can see. We see the dirt on our hands, our feet, our words, our actions, our hearts, our minds. But Jesus rose again. He meets us. He brings cleaning. He brings hope. He brings a new power, one that changes things, one that changes us.

Our God is grounded. Our salvation is grounded. Our forgiveness is grounded. Our eternal life is grounded. It's grounded in an empty hole! Jesus' grave is empty!

It's real. It's true. And its for you. Jesus is alive, and He has come to where you are, for you!

PP#9: *Image of the Garden Tomb, with the door open, perhaps saying, "He is risen!"*

I sent Scott, our Director of Youth and Visual Media, home this weekend, so he could celebrate Easter with his family. For him, Easter is special this year.

Just six months ago, his mother was diagnosed with very aggressive and incurable cancer. She was told there was nothing that could be done. They told her to go home. She was bedridden.

She is a woman of deep faith. As a family they reached out to believers everywhere asking for prayer. We, here at this church, also started praying. But we're weren't just saying our desires to God. We weren't just hoping. We were lifting her to a Jesus who is not dead, but alive, who meets us in our daily lives, who can hear our prayers, and can act on them. Our hope was grounded! We prayed for His healing in her life.

Then, surprisingly, she was finally referred to a specialist at Mayo Clinic. Surprisingly, they were able to diagnose what before could not be seen. Surprisingly, they started a radical treatment that had tremendous effects. And just two weeks ago, she was declared cancer-free.

The risen Jesus granted healing. Now, I don't know why this time that she was healed, and other times other people aren't. Maybe it is simply so I can stand here today and so I can tell you today that this is proof that Jesus is not dead, but alive!

I'm going to ask the ushers to pass around some plastic Easter eggs. There's one for everyone. But I'm going to ask you not to open it. Don't even peak inside. It's not candy. In fact, it's probably not anything you will ever expect. But just hang on. I know, I know, 90% of you don't want to wait for the surprise, but want to sneak a peak, so you know what's coming. Resist! Be open to the surprise! OK?

PP#10: Grounded in an Empty Hole

Easter living: Seeing more than what meets the eye

Easter changes us. When we put our hope in the risen Jesus, when we ground our lives in His empty grave, we can begin to see more than what simply meets the eye. When we live as Easter people, we have a hope in what could be, rather than just what is. There is more to our lives than just what we put in. Jesus is alive, and He meets us in our lives. This past year, a friend of mine was struggling with depression. His life grew dark, and he could see nothing else. He became suicidal. But we prayed. And to our surprise, he struggled his way out. He told me that the only thing that carried him through this, was his faith in Jesus. Jesus did for him, in him, what he could not do himself. People of Easter, who put their hope in the risen Jesus, see beyond just what is in front of us right now.

PP#11: Grounded in an Empty Hole

Easter living: Seeing more than what meets the eye

Easter living: Expecting God to show up

Grab your Easter egg, but don't open it. Just hold it. Expect a surprise.

People of Easter, who put their hope in the risen Jesus, expect God to show up. We have a joy that does not come from what is around us. We live a life expecting our God to make a difference.

Did you notice, in the story of Jesus' resurrection, when the women meet Jesus, they fall at His *feet*, and worship Him. They grabbed His feet! I've never noticed that before. Why *grab* His feet?

Well, we've been walking in Jesus' footsteps, and this time, this caught my attention. It was these feet that brought Jesus into their lives. He came to them, walked among them, brought God to them. These feet carried their God into their lives. They were not alone. God walked with them. And now, when He appeared after His death, they grabbed the feet that again brought Jesus back into their lives. These feet touched the ground, their ground. These feet brought Him back to them. These feet now show them the way. They had Jesus...with them...that day...and forever. God was with them!

When I talked to my Aunt Mary yesterday, we talked of my uncle's life and death. He was a long-time Christian. He had often told me of how real the Lord was to him, and how his life was so blessed because of Jesus. "Other people need to know," he used to tell me. "We can't be afraid to talk about the Lord." My aunt told me how, as he failed over the past few weeks, that he was not afraid to die. He had lived a good, long life, blessed by God. She said he only had one final wish, and that was to die on the farm where he was born. Yesterday, God granted him that blessing, too.

We talked about death. We talked about graves. We talked about Jesus, who had broken the power of death. We talked about the joy we shared, knowing that my uncle had put his trust in the risen Lord, and that my uncle was not dead, but alive. My aunt cried on the phone with me, not tears of sorrow, but tears of joy. She said to me, nothing offers comfort like knowing Roy is finally at home, at peace, with the Jesus he loved so long. She said that Easter would be so special for her this year!

Easter people, you see, expect God to show up. We have experienced Him so much in our lives, that it changes how we think, how we behave, how we tackle what we face. We live openly, letting God get involved, changing things. We learn to trust, to let God, to enjoy the ride.

It's a very different way to live, especially for us who are control freaks, or who are suspicious of surprises. Easter gives us the faith to welcome the surprises, to enjoy them, knowing that our God works all things out for good.

PP#12: Grounded in an Empty Hole

Easter living: Seeing more than what meets the eye

Easter living: Expecting God to show up

Easter living: Our dirt becomes soil

Are you still holding your egg? Don't squeeze it so it opens yet!

When we ground our lives in the hole of Jesus' empty grave, our lives change. The dirt of our lives, our sin, our past, all that we did selfishly, God changes. He takes what we were, what we have been, and makes something new out of it. Only a risen savior can do that! He doesn't just take our sin away, He uses it to grow something new.

I met Tom last year up in Teen Challenge in Duluth. He had come to Teen Challenge as a hopeless drug addict. He had to go through the program three times, but he finally dried out. It was all because of Jesus, he told me. Without Jesus, he would not be clean.

Knowing what a rotten life Jesus saved him from, Tom committed to staying at Teen Challenge as a staff person, and help others find their way to Jesus, and get clean of their addictions. He sits with guys, hour after hour, through the dark of the nights, helping them keep their focus on Jesus. He told me, "Pastor David, I am so blessed. God is using me, what I came through, my past, my sin, to help others find this joy. There is no one else more blessed than me!"

Whatever your past is, whatever your sins may have been, God can forgive them, and then use them to bless others. When you put your faith in an empty grave, your dirt becomes soil.

PP#13: *Image of a flower growing out of a plastic Easter egg.*

It's time to open your eggs...carefully! Go ahead.

Surprise!

It's dirt! Now isn't that a great Easter treat?

Well, come on, we've been talking about dirt since Christmas. Are you really surprised?

But wait a minute. This is no ordinary dirt. It's special. It's dirt from here in Forest Lake. But it is also mixed with dirt from the Holy Land. Our group brought it back last month, when we walked where Jesus walked. You now have a piece of the Holy Land!

Look at it. Easter really happened. We went to where Jesus lived, died, and rose again. It's real.

There's dirt to this story!

Happy Easter!

But there is something else in here you can't see. In this dirt are tiny seeds. Flower seeds.

Out of this Easter dirt can grow new life.

I want you to take it home, and pour this dirt somewhere where you live. Perhaps in a flower bed. Perhaps in a pot by your sink. Water it. Watch it.

New life will grow!

Easter is about surprises. It is about experiencing what we do not expect. It is God breaking into our lives, making things new. Your life is not just what you can see. God has new life, ready to grow from it. When you ground your life in the empty hole of Jesus' grave, new life will grow.

May Jesus, this Easter, work surprises into your life. And may He grow in you and openness, an excitement, for the surprises He has yet to bring.

May you see more than what meets the eye. May you live with a new openness to God showing up and making things different. And may your dirt becomes soil, bringing new life, and blessing.

Christ is risen! [He is risen indeed!]

Surprise!

Closing Song: *Jesus Paid It All* -Sanctify

Benediction: Pastor David