

FIVE FORKS BRETHREN IN CHRIST CHURCH

www.ffbic.org

SERMON: *The Garden of Eden*
SERIES: *Easter*
SCRIPTURES: *Genesis 1-2*
SPEAKER: *Shaun Kipe*
DATE: *3 – 29 - 2020*

**Credit to “Jewish Study Bible”; Gary Moon; John Ortberg; Gordon MacDonald for valuable insights/illustrations throughout this message.*

It’s hard to think that Easter is only two weeks away. And many are concerned about what it will look like come Easter. But, once again, we must remember that God’s people are not a people dependent on a building.

On Easter, a dead man came back to life and it started a movement. It is the reason the Christian church exists today, not the church buildings, but the community of faith and that’s why Easter it is the central story of our faith.

The story of Easter, more than anything else, is our reminder that our faith transcends physical limitations. And it’s why, you should know Easter is not an event that is dependent upon April 12th, 2020.

Because in the end, Easter isn’t about a single day, in the calendar...it’s a story, an event, that shapes every day of our lives. Every day is an Easter day. When I get up today, March 29th, 2020, to live my life, I do it knowing Jesus defeated death and sin. Today is an Easter day. When I get up tomorrow, March 30th 2020, I do it knowing that same story is true. Tomorrow is an Easter day. I have the opportunity to live the New Life Jesus offers, Easter...every day.

I want to encourage you, whether we are here in person or in our homes. We are gonna be telling the story of Easter. Five Forks, we're gonna start today and for the next three weeks, we are going to focus our minds and our hearts and attitudes on this all important season.

The title of our Easter series is: **The Gardener (Series Title Slide)**

You see the story of the Bible in many ways can be traced through a series of three Garden stories.

The Bible begins in a Garden...the **Garden of Eden**. That's what we're going to talk about this morning.

Next week we'll talk about the second garden story, the **Garden of Gethsemane**. It's not a pleasant story, because in that one, we, humans, end up killing the main character in the Bible...the gardener. But we need to talk about it.

Fortunately, there's a third Garden story in the Bible. The Gardener has other plans. That's what we're going to talk about on Easter Sunday. On Easter Sunday you should really be prepared to celebrate and sing and worship...because that third garden story is all about restoring the Garden.

But before we get to Garden number three and our Easter Celebration, we have to start in Garden one...if you have a Bible turn to the very beginning...we're gonna be in Genesis 1-2 this morning.

Genesis 2:8 - ⁸ Now the LORD God had planted a garden in the east, in Eden; and there he put the man he had formed.

God is the gardener and the story of humanity begins in the Garden of Eden. And that original Garden represents how we, humans, were created, from the very beginning, to live and to experience life.

Not that we need to abandon our homes. Not that we all need to like the Better Homes and Garden's magazine or planting flowers/vegetables in the spring.

That's not what I'm talking about. But that there are some key principles about humans and our world that come from that first Garden story. So today, I just want to talk about three key principles from that original garden.

First...

1. Eden reminds us that we were created for pizazz.

And that's probably not the word you expected me to use. But it's such an important concept related to the first garden. Follow me on this for just a second...

Genesis 1 - ² Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters.

There is the picture presented in Genesis 1 of a murky, dark, mysterious, muddled mess of chaos. And into that muddled mess...God says to the universe, "come alive." and it did. Look at verse three...

³ And God said, "Let there be light," and there was light.

God's very first words...Turning the darkness to light.

And that began a series of God's creative acts bringing new life into the world.

Water, and land and sky.

Moon and stars.

Plants and animals.

Sounds and smells.

Space and time... “monkey’s and mangos, heat and cold, a vast palette of colors and all the smells from Franklin County manure to bacon frying in a pan. He thought it, he saw it and then he sang it into existence.” (Gary Moon)

There’s actually a Latin phrase that theologians have used to express the significance of what’s taking place in the creation story here. The phrase is “**ex nihilo**”...which literally means... “**out of nothing**.” Out of dry, boring, dull, uninteresting...nothingness God decides to create something.

In fact, did you know this...actually I’m not gonna tell you. You’re at home, quick get out your cell phone, google the word “Eden”...what does the word Eden mean in English? I’ll give you a sec... Don’t you love this? One of the senses, in the original language Eden means... “**delight**”.

And it’s why, the writer Anne Dillard said, “***because the creator loves pizazz.***” (John Ortberg)

I don’t know if you’ve ever thought about God that way before. But I love that picture of Eden. God loves pizazz. God saw a mass of chaos, He decided to turn it into a world full of pizazz.

And I’ll just tell you why I think this is so important for you and me to grasp. When people think about the Christian faith today, so often people think of it rigid, dull, uninteresting, boring...it’s set in stone...anything but Pizazz.

But to see the world that way, your life that way and your faith that way...is to get stuck in Genesis 1:2...a world that is formless and empty.

But that's not what the first garden story in your Bible is about. Eden reminds us, that we were created for a world of color and diversity and life and creativity.

Let there be light...because the creator loves pizazz!

John Ortberg says it this ways...

*He sends streams of living water **(PICTURE OF WILDERNESS STREAMS/FORESTS)** flowing out of sheer exuberant generosity. There is a wilderness where no one lives, yet it is full of beauty and grace because God makes a river run through it. (There are unexplored places in our world, the depths of the ocean and the far reaches of mountains and wilderness, filled with beauty that only God can see. Because he loves pizazz!*

*God delights in animals that are of no apparent use at all. The ostrich **(PICTURE OF OSTRICH)** looks goofy and flaps her wings "joyfully" as if they could get her somewhere. She lays eggs and can't even remember where she left the babies. She doesn't seem to be worth much of an investment. But when she runs — Scripture says in the book of Job! "She laughs at horse and rider."*

God takes pleasure in wild oxen that will never plow; the wild donkey that will never be tamed; mountain goats that give birth in secret places man will never see; the leviathan that no one can catch. (Ortberg, God is Closer than you think)

Sometimes when I look at my world I get stuck in Genesis 1:2. Dull, uninteresting, set in stone...nothing new or exciting. And it's why I'm so thankful every day that God put Landon in our family. He's 10 years old and he never gets stuck in Genesis 1:2. He lives a life full of pizazz and imagination and wonder. He sees the world in a in Genesis 1:3 kind of way. "Let there be light."

Just the other day, our family went for a hike in the mountains (**Pic of Kipe family hike**). I saw a small tree branch on the path and I picked up and I was about to toss into the woods. It's just a dull, boring, silly, old tree branch. (**HOLD UP THE BRANCH**) Nothing special about it. My hand was in motion. And then Landon yelled at the top of his lungs, "Dad stop!" I paused, "What's up buddy?" He stared at the branch, mesmerized! "Dad, you found it!" "Found what?" "I have never seen anything so beautiful in all my life?" (For a moment I thought he must not be talking about the tree branch, surely he must be talking about me!).

"That branch. In fact, that's not a branch all...that is the One. That is the only. That is the legendary, one of a kind lightsaber of Master Yoda. That is a blade of pure plasma...emitted from the hilt...suspended in a force containment field. That stick you hold, is a symbol of the Jedi order...synonymous with good overcoming evil and the dark side...and our fight to uphold peace and justice, throughout the galaxy."

Alright, he may not have said all that, but for a moment I was incredulous. How could he see so much in a tree branch? His eyes are looking for pizazz! He understands that creation moves from Genesis 1:2 to Genesis 1:3. Darkness to light.

Eden reminds us, that God has made us to experience joy in creativity, because He, the Gardener, wanted a Garden, a world full of pizazz!

This is why one of the central themes around the Easter season...is the anticipation and celebration of new life.

And I've always loved this, in our part of or the world, we have the added bonus that we celebrate Easter during spring! Our physical world kind of reminds us that Easter is a time of new life, it's a taste of that first garden. Flowers blooming, birds chirping etc. It's like the world is screaming the pizazz of the creator all around us, if we'll just open our eyes and see it!

I want to encourage us, as a church, over the next couple of weeks as we begin thinking about and preparing for Easter...to find and give time to creative activity. We're a church all about the pizazz and new Life of the Easter season!

And this is really important, we all express our pizazz in different ways. It does NOT mean that we are all good or even enjoy art projects or gardening or seeing lightsabers in tree branches!

For example, pizazz for me is often related to writing sermons. Trying to convey concepts and information in ways that people can resonate, but that are also engaging and practical and can help the stories of the Bible come to life.

For graphic designers it's putting words or phrases into pictures or images. Putting colors together in ways that haven't been done before but that will stand out, draw attention of consumers.

For engineers it's solving problems in ways not yet thought of. New modes of transportation or new forms of energy to power our planet. Its new designs for bridges or buildings.

For doctors and nurses, it's ways to care for patients that go beyond simply giving them the right doses of medicine.

For teachers it's finding new ways to share information to students (teachers who teach their kids to rap).

Maybe for some mom's and dad's it's sitting on the floor and building lego's with your kids or getting out finger paints or building a fort out of old wood scraps in your garage.

For couples it's dates, or love letters or new expression of your love for one another!

The gardener created a garden of pizazz and He invites us to participate in that!

Second,

2. Eden reminds us that we were created for order.

And I know this doesn't sound nearly as exciting. We've gone from pizazz to order! And often the word "order" is not viewed in a positive light in our culture. Order is associated with rules and discipline. It can seem restrictive or limiting.

But order is essential. Order in gardens is especially important. If you want to experience the abundance of produce from your garden, you have to be ordered in your approach.

There are recommended distances for planting your plants apart. There is a certain amount of water or sun-light necessary for various plants to grow, thrive and eventually produce.

If you don't arrange your garden, you will quickly learn about the process of "cross-pollination". There are certain plants that can and can't be planted near each other. Gardens thrive on order. But it's not just gardens...order is essential to so many things in our world.

Think about how order is related to music. Music is an incredibly creative endeavor, but music requires order. There are certain notes that when played simultaneously are pleasant to listen to. We say, they are in harmony. It means, they are in order, they follow the rules of music. (PLAY TWO NOTES) There are other notes that when played simultaneously are not pleasant to listen to. To make music, means putting notes in order. It's called being in key. And we recognize when notes are not "in key". They are out of tune. Order has been lost.

Order is essential to driving. You must drive on the right side of the road in the United States. Obey road signs. Grocery stores, order all over the place. Schools. Hospitals. Athletics. If you take away the order in any of these areas of life, it falls apart.

Which is why, in Genesis 1, and just turn to Genesis for a minute...we get this fascinating account of the Gardener bringing chaos into order. The earth is formless and empty, darkness over the murky waters...but watch what happens...

DAY 1 – Light

DAY 2 – Waters above (sky) & Water below (oceans/seas)

DAY 3 – Land

Then watch this...notice the order, pattern of creation...

DAY 4 fills day 1 – Sun & Moon

DAY 5 fills day 2 – Birds fill the waters above (sky) and fish fill the waters below

DAY 6 fills day 3 – Land animals and humans to fill the land.

There is an orderliness built into the Garden.

But wait, there's more. Even within the original Hebrew language, the telling of the story of creation in Genesis 1, it's filled with order and patterns.

The number **7** for example, in the ancient world was an expression of wholeness or completeness and is found all through the creation story.

Creation happens in a 7 day sequence. Hebrew scholars agree that the seventh day is the climax of the creation story. In the section devoted to the seventh day, there

are exactly 35 words (7x5) in the Hebrew language. The phrase “And God saw that it was good”...appears exactly 7 times. The word “God”, occurs exactly 35 times.

Are you beginning to see the pattern and order instilled in that first Garden?

Eden reminds us that we were created for order.

Your life, was created to have a certain pattern, flow, rhythm, harmony...order!

When we seek to promote order, we are joining the work of the first Gardener.

Think about order in relation to your personal life.

Eat healthy.

Exercise regularly.

Stimulate your brain.

Work hard/be productive.

Play often/have fun/laugh/enjoy.

Rest when you're tired. Sleep well.

It's part of the rhythm of life.

Because, you see if you start messing with the order, when something disrupts the pattern or flow...it throws everything off.

If you stop eating and sleeping properly and disrupt your physical body. This results in tired and hungry. But, have you noticed, it's not just that you are tired and hungry, it will begin to affect your emotions and your attitude. Your desire to do the laundry, to get to work on time, to pay the bills.

You've disrupted the order.

This is why it is so important to think about the pattern of life that you are creating and that you are living. What are the routines and habits that you are incorporating into your life?

Order in your schedule.

Order in your eating. Order to your sleep pattern.

Ordering of your finances.

Say yes, to what you need more of and say no, eliminate areas that have become excess or out of tune.

And you must have order, related to your spiritual life. You must be intentional, disciplined, and thoughtful in your approach. Dallas Willard says it like this...

“Spiritual formation in Christ is an orderly process. Although God can triumph in disorder, that is not his choice...we must humble ourselves to accept the ways he has chosen to work with us. These are clearly laid out in the Bible, and especially in the words and person of Jesus.” (Willard 10)

If my desire is to be a runner. I have to get up and run consistently.

If my desire is to master the piano, I have to practice regularly and daily.

If my desire is to be patient, gentle, joyful, peaceful, content, loving...to take on the heart, character, the life of Jesus. Then you, we must be intentional and ordered in our approach. It will not happen by chance.

It will begin by surrendering your life to His and then daily submitting your will, desires, decisions, and actions to Him.

Pizazz and order.

Third and finally...

3. Gardener declares that the garden is good.

One of the phrases that you find over and over again (7 times) in the creation story is the phrase... “God saw that it was good...”

God said, “Let there be light,” and there was light. ⁴ God saw that the light was good,

**¹⁰ God called the dry ground “land,” and the gathered waters he called “seas.”
And God saw that it was good.**

³¹ God saw all that he had made, and it was very good.

Goodness comes from the Gardener.

And there are two reasons why this is very important.

First,

A. It is God who declares things good.

Goodness is not something we humans, our culture or our society gets to determine for ourselves.

The theologian Augustine once remarked, **“God being God offends human pride.”** Because if God is running the universe and has first claim on our lives, guess who isn’t running the universe and does not get to have things as they please.” (Willard, Renovation of the Heart pg 52)

See the problem is, if you eliminate the Gardener, goodness is simply a human, social construct. And each person has the freedom to make goodness anything they want it to be.

But if God is the one who defines what goodness is...then we are responsible to His definition.

The first Garden is very clear about this. We don't get to determine goodness for ourselves, God determines goodness.

If generosity/sharing with those who have less is God's idea of goodness...then I am responsible to live that way.

If resting as a regular habit in my life is part of God's idea of goodness...then I'm responsible to live that way.

If treating the environment with respect and concern so that plants, trees, animals and our ecosystem can thrive is part of God's idea of goodness...then I'm responsible to live that way. (Pollution has no place.)

If all people are created in God's image and therefore all people have inherent value, because God says so...and if loving my neighbors and my enemies is part of God's idea of goodness...then I'm responsible to live that way.

If submitting my will to God's will, is part of God's idea of goodness...then I'm responsible to live that way.

On the other hand...

If buying whatever I want, whenever I want (greed/materialism) isn't part of God's idea of goodness...I am responsible, with God's help, to eliminate that from my life.

If eating whatever I want, whenever I want (gluttony) isn't part of God's idea of goodness...I am responsible, with God's help, to eliminate that from my life.

If laziness or dishonesty or losing my temper or lust aren't part of God's idea of goodness...I am responsible, with God's help, to eliminate that from my life.

The first Garden reminds us that it is God who declares things good.

Second, it's always helpful to...

B. Start the Christian story with goodness.

I'll tell you why this is so important. So often, in sharing the story of our Christian faith, with those outside the church, we start in **Genesis 3** instead of Genesis 1... Do you know what happens in Genesis 3? We're going to talk more about this next week. Genesis 3 is **The FALL**. Adam and Eve disobey God. Sin enters the world.

And so often, we begin by telling people about the fall of humanity and their sinfulness.

We start our story with... "You are a sinner. All have sinned." And while it is true that this is an important, crucial piece of the story. It is not where the Bible begins the story of humanity. The Biblical story begins with the message that you are created for goodness!

I just think this is a message our world desperately needs today. And it may help to change some of the perception of the Christian story if we started the story where the Bible starts the story.

So as we prepare for Easter, let's remember that first Garden, we were created for...A garden of pizzazz and order and goodness.