A few weekends back I had the great opportunity to have one of my Sunday’s off, and spent some time with my family. I always love sharing about camps at churches, but this Sunday was special because I was able to take my children over to my mom and dad’s place to visit and play for a while. It was a beautiful day, with the sun slowly peeking out behind some fluffy cumulous clouds. It also was a day that my sister was able to come home and see the kids for a while. The afternoon was delightful and really fun as we played mostly outside so as to take advantage of such a wonderful day. I just can’t tell you how much fun it is to watch 3 and 5 year olds playing tag out in the yard, and even playing the traditional hide and go seek game (they’re pretty good at it—you try to find them). It makes me want to be a kid again. My mom and dad’s farm is also right next to a small country cemetery across the road from their home. It is here that most of my lineage is buried. As we ended the day the older generations of the family (this includes me now) decided to walk over to the cemetery to look at some of our families gravestones and to pay our respects. The younger one’s followed, all the way down to my daughter who happens to be 3. I always find it hard to know how to act when I go to a cemetery, so I just watch others.

Typically when I’m by myself though, I usually set beside my family member’s resting place and just have a visit with them, knowing that in some way they can hear me. For me, it really is a God filled experience, and normally in this place of quietness I can hear my soul remembering all the beautiful memories that I once remembered about my loved one. My sister, who is in her mid-50’s had the hardest time that afternoon, as she had lost her husband 3 years prior, so for her, it was a time for a few tears as she folded her arms with one hand gently rubbing against her cheek as she looked down at that beautiful swirled, tan colored granite stone. For my father who is almost 80 it was a time with a solemn glance and special smile as he looked down on the gray granite stone that displayed the names of his parents, and my grandparents. For a quiet, stoic farmer I often see in his face the wish that grandpa could see the farm again even after so many years of being gone.

For each of us, our response was one of solemn gratefulness for the lives that had touched us so much, but in the midst of that I sensed a bit of sadness and aloneness residing in each of our hearts. But, when I turned my head, I noticed the little children, running all over the cemetery looking at every grave marker and asking, “Who is this?” In his own manner, grandpa took them to his parent’s marker and showed them the engraved names and birthdates (both dates are really birthdates), and said that he wished they could have known his mommy and daddy. My children were quiet, but smiling still asking questions to grandpa. In some ways they could sense a bit of sadness and solemnness in grandpa’s
voice, but all had a very keen interest in listening to the stories. But what amazed me most was within all that time the smiles continued and the fun and joy in their eyes didn’t diminish, in fact it was as though this place of finality didn’t even faze them, it was as if there was no sadness at all, and not a fear to be seen.

I’ve been thinking about this event for the last few weeks, in fact it’s not left my mind, nor my heart. How is it that even at my age, which is only in my 40’s, and being a pastor, I find that there is still uneasiness in my soul when I think about death. I really don’t mind going to cemeteries mind you, but my mind does venture into the reality of what this final resting place means. I think many of us are like this, on the outside we feel strong, we feel like we can handle anything, but when it comes to this one thing, at the very core of our understanding we still have some unsettling questions and quite possibly some fears. Why? As I sat there watching my little children that day, I remembered a week prior we had just celebrated a ‘risen Savior’, we had heard of the One who had defeated and defied the final fear called death. Though I know my reaction of being a bit sad and solemn was certainly not inappropriate, I admired how the children reacted to this place. I would assume that it’s quite possible that if there had been other families there, some might have thought my children’s display a bit disrespectful or irreverent. I have to be honest, at first I thought maybe the children are showing too much exuberance and I should have them ‘quiet down’, but my thoughts changed as we stayed longer. Their joy inspired me, and helped me to understand that I can run and yell with joy even in a place where things seem so final. In fact, where best to show your faith and belief in a God who defeated death for good, than in a place where death is so visible. Maybe death still has too much power over us.

Maybe the words that so loudly came to me the week before hadn’t really sunk in: “He has risen!” “Yes, he has risen indeed!” I try to walk with God and talk with God, and believe that my life was totally and radically changed over 30 years ago when I brought Jesus into my life as my personal Savior, but maybe the greatest gift he’d given me hadn’t sunk in; the joy of just simply knowing that my life is in the eternal hands of God. Maybe I hadn’t truly realized that nothing on this earth can ever separate me from Him, not even death. Maybe I’d given too much credence to that old nemesis called death, and quite possibly maybe I hadn’t taken God’s promises at face value. And maybe this world, which seems to always focus on things that don’t last, those things that ultimately are passing away, maybe it had a grasped me a little too tightly. And maybe, it took some precious little ones, who had just come from God, to remind me that death doesn’t have the upper hand or the final say, but God does.

“Let the Children come unto me for such belongs the Kingdom of Heaven.” Matthew 19:14