

Sermon: In a Garden of New Life    Psalm 118:1-2, 14-24    John 20: 1-18

It was only a few brief days ago that we were witnesses to the trial, crucifixion, and death of our Lord, Jesus. Oh, how today is so very different! It all began in a garden; a garden of life; a place of creation *and* new life. Here, most everything is budding with growth potential. So, our Scriptures reveal to us that both physical life and eternal life have their genesis in a garden setting. First, Adam and Eve were conceived by God and had their beginning in a garden. In fact, it was a lush and vibrant garden of comfort and sanctuary. Yet, because of a disobedient act; the original sin of Adam and Eve; they were both expelled from this idyllic paradise. Their lives were cast into a wilderness of despair and death. Paradise was now a distant memory. Yet here we are on this early Easter morning, hearing of yet another garden; a garden of eternal life made possible through our resurrected Saviour, Jesus Christ. Yes, Jesus was crucified, died, and was buried, a few short days ago, but here we are again in a transformational garden setting. So, today we are witness to the second Adam; Jesus Christ. Only this time, it is not the creation story, but a re-creation story. Ours is a God of second chances.

As we heard in the Gospel reading for this morning, Mary Magdalene is the first to enter this garden, and here she discovers it was much more than a garden of memories; more than a cemetery to receive the remains of a lifeless body. Mary is a principal character in the drama that unfolds in this garden of new life. She has returned to attend to the lifeless body of Christ, but is further mortified to find the sealing stone rolled away from the entrance of the borrowed tomb, and her friend's body gone. She must have been panic-stricken in that moment; a moment of fear and trepidation. In her anxiety and confusion, Mary runs to Peter and John, telling them that "They took the Master from the tomb. We don't know where they have put him". Mary needs to hear comforting words; to know that there is a rational explanation for what has happened. This painful state of not knowing is among the greatest challenges she has ever faced.

Yet in this dramatic Easter Garden account, we too accompany Mary and encounter a resurrected Jesus. In *this* moment, we realize that we are the recipients of many fruitful blessings still to come because without that glorious resurrection there would be no hope; no assurance of everlasting life. Because Jesus lives; because He is risen; we are provided the assurance that we will live with Him forever. Christ has conquered death and we will live together eternally in the heavenly garden of paradise that God has created.

While Mary floundered in that garden setting; failing to recognize her resurrected friend and Lord; we are fortunate to live on the other side of the story. We have journeyed with Jesus throughout Lent, and we know the outcome realized in God's promises. The Gospel tells us Mary did not recognize Jesus, at first. *How*, we wonder, could she not have immediately recognized the One she loved and followed in the three years of His earthly ministry?

*How* could she not recognize the One who was so very close and dear to her; the One who chased the demons from her soul, healed her, and forgave her sins? Well, Jesus was different now. Just as with Moses and Elijah on the mount; when Jesus was transformed with brilliant heavenly light; here He was transformed again; this time before her very eyes.

We who follow Christ, will also be transformed at our end of days. To the church at Corinth,

the apostle Paul said, “Now the Lord is the Spirit, and we all, who with unveiled faces consider the Lord’s glory, are being transformed into his image with ever-increasing glory”. We know that when Mary finally recognized Jesus, she tried to give Him a hug, but Jesus cautioned her, “Do not hold on to me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father”. Mary did not remain in that garden long. Her encounter with Jesus created so much excitement that she knew she must share this good news with others. In fact, Jesus said to do so. Full of hope and wonder, she again raced to Peter and John and boldly exclaimed, “I have seen the Master!” For Mary, Peter, and John, and for all who follow in the footsteps of Jesus, it was simply the best news ever heard.

Yes, Easter is the most glorious day of the year. It is the day we celebrate the joyous news that the Master is alive; that a new, transformed life has blossomed in a garden. Because Christ Jesus went down into the grave and defeated death, His victory assures us of His wonderful promise that “Because I live, you also will live!” Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Thanks be to God, now and forever. Amen.

May God bless you and keep you.

I look forward to seeing you at worship on Sunday.