

Easter Day
Year A

Acts 10:34-43
Psalm 118:1-2, 14-24
Colossians 3:1-4
John 20:1-18

Alleluia. Christ is risen.
The Lord is risen indeed. Alleluia.

The Gardener - The Tree of Life

Jesus said to [Mary], 'Woman, why are you weeping? For whom are you looking?' - John 20:15

This is one of my favorite gospel passages. I know, I know, I'm a priest I have to like a gospel lesson on the resurrection, right? Well, ... yes, but it's actually not the resurrection that I love about this passage. (Stay with me here.) It's something embedded in this passage that is often overlooked.

Mary Magdalene, a follower of Jesus, had gone to the tomb of Jesus to mourn the loss of this man whom she had placed all of her hope in and whom she had just a few days earlier seen beaten and publically executed and reviled by her own religious leaders. In the last several days she and many others had been on an emotional roller coaster like nothing else. The man that had healed incurable ailments and diseases, the man who had miraculously fed thousands of people from scant provisions, the man who could control the weather and defy the physical laws of this universe, the man who could even bring someone else back to life after they had been dead for several days, that man, *he* himself, was now dead. If he could raise the dead, but now he was dead, then that's the end. Death did have the last word - at least in Mary's eyes.

As she was getting closer to the tomb she noticed something wrong. The stone that had been placed in front of the entrance to the tomb had been pushed out of the way. The tomb was open! That wasn't right for so many reasons. Was someone in there? What were they doing? And besides, his body should have been well on its way to decomposing by now - three days after his death - decomposing back into the dust. Overcome with emotion she turned and ran to tell Jesus' closest friends - his disciples. She needed to tell them something was wrong; the stone had been moved.

Back in town as soon as the words left Mary's mouth Peter and John immediately ran from the house they were staying in straight to where Jesus had been buried. They got there out of breath, exhausted, wanting to collapse on the ground and they looked into the tomb and realized that something was wrong. Jesus' body was gone. Have you ever went to retrieve something and when you got there it was gone? It's like standing in the parking lot precisely where you had parked your car, but it is vanished - stolen with only a scattering of broken window glass confirming where it had been. Only for Mary, Peter, and John it wasn't a car, it was a person - a body - the person who was supposed to fix everything ... that is, before he had been executed.

Peter and John headed back into town to tell the others what they had seen and Mary, who had rejoined them back at the tomb, was left alone in the silence. She slowly walked toward the tomb to look in for herself. And as she bent down she was startled to see two angels sitting inside the tomb where Jesus' body should have been. The angels were curious as to why she was crying, Mary blurted out, "They have taken my Lord away, and I do not know where they have put him!" (John 20:13) Exasperated, she turned and nearly ran straight into another person who had approached from behind her. He too seemed indifferent to her near hysteria and asked, "Mam, why are you crying? Who are you looking for?"

And this is where it gets interesting.

Because at this point Mary doesn't realize that she is speaking directly to Jesus himself. There is no scenario in her mind where Jesus was an option as someone that could be encountered in that moment.

But Jesus was alive and she was the first to see him! And before she realizes it is Jesus she thinks that she's talking to the gardener - the caretaker for this garden tomb. (John 19:41)

“Supposing him to be the gardener, she said to him, ‘Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him.’” (John 20:15) And this is where my spirit starts to dance!

The Gardener!

Where else do we know of a garden in the Scriptures? The Garden of Eden.

I don't think that this is some mistake or coincidence on God's part that Jesus was buried in a garden tomb and was mistaken for being the gardener. God isn't slapping his forehead and saying, “Wow! That worked out nicely!” No! It was the plan from the start. In the same way God created the whole universe and began our human existence in a garden - when everything was brand new, fresh, created to glorify God, it was in a garden - and now the fact that Jesus walked out of the grave in a garden and is thought to be the gardener tells us the magnitude of what God is doing in the resurrection. It tells us that this is equal to the creation of all things back in Genesis. It is the dawning of a new time - a new creation - with the freshness and newness of Genesis. It isn't putting a new veneer overtop the old. For those who place their faith and trust in Jesus it is giving us a new birth - being born again - not into the same old, same old of this life, but rather into the Garden of God's kingdom.

And standing in that Garden back in Eden was something else. Something that has been guarded ever since Adam and Eve were kicked out of that Garden for trying to exert their ‘perceived’ authority over and above God's true authority. And the thing that was standing in the middle of that garden was The Tree of Life.

The Tree of Life had been closed off to Adam and Eve and to us because of our sin. But in this new Garden - this garden of Jesus' resurrection the angelic guards surrounding the Tree of Life have been taken off duty. We are no longer separated from God. The sins which previously barred Adam and Eve and us from the Tree of Life have been taken away, washed clean, and forgiven.

Not only do we first see the Tree of Life in the Garden of Eden at the beginning of the Bible in Genesis, but we will also hear of it again all the way in the last book of the Bible, the Revelation of John. The apostle John wrote the gospel of John (of today's lesson showcasing the Gardener) and he also wrote the last book of the Bible known as his Revelation, which was given to him in a vision by Jesus. And John records Jesus' own words in his Revelation as he closes the canon of the Bible.

“To everyone who is victorious [perseveres in a life of faith] I will give fruit from the tree of life in the paradise of God.” (Revelation 2:7)

John, the revelator, goes on to tell us that those who have washed their robes, which is his way of saying those who have placed their faith and trust in the risen Lord Jesus, “they will have the right to the tree of life.” (Revelation 22:14)

Today, if your life feels like it is slowly dying; if there is something in your life that you feel has drawn its last breath and can never be resurrected, then the risen Jesus says wait, because **he's been dead himself and he knows the way back to life**. Jesus says give me the things in your life that are dead and dying because he is the Gardener tending the Tree of Life and for those who trust in him that Tree is free for the eating.

And when one eats from this heavenly Tree of Life tended by a risen Gardener then healing will come. This access to the Tree of Life through this heavenly Gardener, Jesus, John tells us in his Revelation will actually ultimately heal the nations. (Revelation 22:2) But the only way to heal a dead and dying world is to trust the One who has been dead himself and knows the remedy for the sickness.

“Supposing him to be the gardener.” Little did Mary know that day that this seeming ‘mistake’ would instead be the lens to see the fullness of what God was up to that day. Resurrection in a garden giving access to the Tree of Life that will heal our sickness, brokenness, and sinfulness, and ultimately heal the nations! This is a big day. “Supposing him to be the gardener.” Good one Mary. Amen.

Alleluia. Christ is risen.

The Lord is risen indeed. Alleluia.