

“In the Garden”

April 4, 2021 Easter Sunday
John 20: 1-18

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This Easter doesn't feel like the celebration we grew up expecting Easter to be. My reflections feel small for such an occasion. But always we come as we are, and I pray you will lean in and find life not in the big and splashy, but in the small and unexpected places.

The Easter story begins in a garden. It begins in darkness and in confusion. The Sabbath, the day that no one could work, was over, and so at the first possible opportunity Mary goes to the tomb. It does not mention her bringing spices in John's gospel, but likely that is why she was going to the tomb. There had not been enough time on Friday after Jesus died on the cross (and before sundown when the Sabbath began) for them to properly prepare the body. They didn't embalm bodies but they did wash bodies and wrap them with spices to counteract the stench of death and decay. It was how one showed respect to the dead.

The traumatic events of Friday, when she stood by and watched in horror as her teacher, her friend, her Saviour died a slow, violent and painful death — are still fresh. Her world, their world had been turned upside down and likely she was still in shock... still on auto pilot. There is no way she has processed the events that have taken place.

Perhaps she comes to the tomb because she can't sit still. She has to do something. Perhaps she comes to the tomb just to confirm that it's all true — just to be sure she hasn't had some prolonged nightmare, even though she is pretty sure she has not slept a wink since it happened. Perhaps she comes to the tomb for some peace.

The one good thing about death is that you can count on it. Living has drama and surprises, death has no surprises. We can only take so much uncertainty. We know about uncertainty and needing to change plans as we go through wave after wave of lockdowns and restrictions.

Though she didn't want it, Mary needed the stability of the tomb. It would ground her in reality. It would be the rock bottom on which she could sit and know it couldn't get any worse ... and the rock bottom that would eventually give her enough support to stand and begin to heal. So when she arrived at the tomb and saw the stone moved and the tomb empty, it was not a welcome sight. It was not cause for celebration. It was shock on top of trauma.

Mary drops everything. She runs to get Peter and the other disciple who in turn run back to the tomb to confirm what Mary has said. The body is gone.

In John's story, the other disciple is known as "*the one whom Jesus loved*". We don't know for sure who this disciple was but most think that it is John, the one who is writing this gospel, as a way of writing himself into the story. It's kind of sweet, because John felt so loved by Jesus that he was sure he was the most loved, the favourite.

Don't kids always jockey and joke around about who is the favourite one?... it's me — right, mom? The disciples were no different. But I suspect each one of the disciples thought they were the favourite one. Because that's how Jesus was. The presence and the love he gives to each person is complete.

The disciples leave the scene, but Mary stays. She has nowhere to go and nothing more to give. She collapses in grief and just weeps and weeps beside the tomb. I don't know how long she wept. I imagine it was a long time, but at some point, she looks up into the tomb and sees the angels ... and can't make any sense of them. Then she sees another man who turns out to be Jesus himself, risen from the dead, but she doesn't recognize him yet.

We don't know what the resurrection was like exactly. There are four different accounts of it and they are each different. They each contain beauty and truth, but we don't get an exact timeline of the event.



It's not like how the entire world was watching the 'Ever Given' stuck in the Suez Canal and how we witnessed the blow by blow of how they got it moving —with the help of a couple of Canadian tug boats they got it to rise and float again. It was a strangely fascinating story.

For the disciples especially, it was like the world came to a total stop. At the death of Jesus all the hope, all the love, all the promise just stops. From Friday until Sunday nothing moves ... and there seems to be no hope of anything moving again.

But there is no blow by blow description of Jesus rising from the dead. There is no big Eureka! moment or giant applause when Jesus emerges from the tomb. There are no headlines or high-fives. It's just the opposite. Things begin to move and live in an imperceptibly small way.

The way that Mary knows he is alive, is not from the words of the angels. The way she really knows it is him is when she hears him say her name: "Mary". In that moment she knows he is alive. Speaking her name is like a mustard seed in the history of the church.

That's where it starts and where it begins to grow. Slowly at first. She runs and tells the disciples. Soon after Jesus reveals himself to them and to a

few unknown people on a road, and to others. The Risen Christ quickly becomes revealed and alive in this group of people known as the Church.

I think this image should be the photo of the year. So often that is how we feel up against all the evils, all the things we can't control; like a global pandemic. We laugh at that little excavator in the photo — but small things in the hands of God make a big difference.



In a way that is why this Easter story rings so true to me. It is so small and yet so mind-blowingly transformational. We want demonstrations of power — but the Creator knows that true power is small and looks insignificant in the eyes of the world.

What does true power really look like? Like being fully present as someone shares their story, or forgiving the person who betrayed you, or making a micro loan to a woman in Pakistan who is building a dairy business, or even being patient and kind to that irritable relative. Or maybe you can lobby government to do the right thing, not the popular thing.

In what small way are you called to live out the Easter story? In what way will you say with your afternoon, your day, your life: Love lives. Love wins!

Before she hears her name, Mary thinks this man is the gardener. The irony is she is right. He is the gardener. Do you remember how the world began in the story of the Creation in the Bible?

It begins in darkness and in chaos. Like that Easter morning. Like today. Once Creation is complete, where does the story rest and take shape? In a garden. This is no coincidence. In the Creation story—which we don't take as history but as containing truth—creation turns sour with the fall of Adam and Eve and the breakdown of the relationship between humanity and God. Jesus who is called the Second Adam, the son of man, redeems the fall and, returns us to the garden—where nothing separates us from God's love.

Romans 8: 34–39 *“It is Christ Jesus, who died, yes, who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who indeed intercedes for us. Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will hardship, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword... No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.”*

Jesus is indeed the gardener who is alive and is calling you—you who are his favourite, his beloved. Do you feel that? Spend time in the garden this

Easter and hear the Risen Christ call your name and call you to new life — a life that you can't help but share with a thirsty world. Amen.