

Easter Sunday – April 9, 2023
John 20:1-20

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Alleluia, Christ is risen! (Christ is risen indeed! Alleluia!)
Grace, mercy, and peace to you in the name of Jesus Christ.

It's gardening season again. Those of you who are real gardeners have already been planning your gardens and cultivating your seedlings for several months now. Those of us who are not real gardeners, those of us who dabble, have only just noticed how nice the weather is. It must be time to get outside, clean up the yard, and think about buying seedlings that others have grown.

Today's Gospel reading, the resurrection account of John, takes place in a garden. You don't pick that up unless you have read the end of the previous chapter, which we would have done on Friday, except that we chose to read from Matthew's Gospel then, and Matthew does not give us that detail. John's Gospel is the only one that mentions that the tomb in which Jesus was buried was located in a garden. So it's no surprise then that Mary Magdalene, who was so focused on Jesus' tomb, so caught up in her grief at the death of her friend, would have mistaken Jesus for a gardener. It's a garden that they're in, after all. And it may still have been early morning. Who else would be there? Not Jesus, of course. She already *knows* he's not there. She knows that because she saw him die. She saw him die, and then she watched as his body was taken down from the cross and put in this garden tomb. So she *knows* that this isn't Jesus. That's "her truth," as we have become fond of saying. I don't know if you followed the recent court case in which the actress Gwyneth Paltrow was sued for running into a man on a ski course. It turns out, though, that *he* ran into *her*, and apparently only decided to claim the opposite when he learned that it was a famous person he had run into and saw dollar signs. The case, you might have heard, was decided in favor of Ms. Paltrow, who was awarded court costs plus one dollar in a countersuit. When she was interviewed afterwards about this man making a false claim, she was very gracious and said that that story was "his truth." Maybe this shouldn't be surprising, because she is well known for having some of her own "truths" that she would be happy to sell you. But she is not the only one. Truth is a slippery thing. And God knows that truth is something we are having a hard time with in our day and age. Vladimir Putin's "truth" has led to a year of open warfare in Ukraine in which hundreds of thousands of people are estimated to have died. The real number will likely not be known for some time. That on top of destruction of infrastructure, homes, and entire cities, and the displacement of millions of civilians. And always lingering in the background of this conflict is the threat of nuclear war, which would of course be catastrophic. But we have had our own struggles over the truth here in this country in recent years, don't we, even documented cases now of purposeful and widespread distortion of the truth for profit and other personal benefit. People lie to our faces in the most obvious of ways and we believe them, or at least make sure "their truths" get equal coverage, because we don't want to be accused of bias. At times we seem to be living in a science-fiction fever dream, a fractured universe in which parallel realities co-exist, each with its own "truth." But maybe we have always had trouble with truth. In that passion reading that we *didn't* read on Friday, Pontius Pilate famously asked Jesus "What is truth?" And Jesus, famously didn't answer. At least not then, not directly.

But let's get back to Mary in the garden and "her truth." Her truth is that death is our final destination, that dead bodies stay dead and don't walk out of tombs, that the power of the sword, the spear, and the cross is the real power that rules this world. It's a very reasonable thing to

believe. And it's backed by lots of evidence. It's a truth that we believe too. Death is the end, Mary knows, violence rules the world, and this man standing in front of her is a gardener.

The message of Easter, as we have already shouted out a couple of times, is that Mary's truth, while perhaps temporarily true, is not true in the long run. "Christ is risen indeed" we have told each other, last night already at the Easter Vigil and this morning too. And there's more of that to come. It is, we must acknowledge, a competing truth with all of the other "truths" out there, including the very reasonable ones. But we can also say that Mary's truth turns out to be right in at least one respect. Jesus is a gardener after all. It's no accident that Jesus' resurrection and the new life it brings takes place in a garden. That's where it all started in the first place, according to the second creation story back in Genesis chapter two. God planted a garden between the rivers and brought forth life: plants, animals, and then humans. And then God charged the humans with tending the garden.

By setting Jesus' death and resurrection in a garden, John the Evangelist and Theologian is signaling to us that this is new creation. This is where new life begins for us and for the whole world. This is creation 2.0, and here is Jesus, newly alive, brought out of the ground as the first human was brought out of the ground. And he is gardening, engaged in the original vocation of humankind. And he's a real gardener, not just a dabbler. Because for the three years before his crucifixion he has been planning his new garden and cultivating his seedlings. We've been hearing about that during the season of Lent that has just passed. (Lent, as you may know, is the old English word for Spring.) Our Gospel readings in Lent have been little case studies in seedling cultivation: the Pharisee Nicodemus, who became a secret follower of Jesus and helped to place Jesus' body in the tomb (yeah, it's in that previous chapter that we didn't read), the Samaritan woman at the well, the man born blind, and finally his friend Lazarus and his sisters, Mary and Martha. All of these, and the others whose lives Jesus touched, Jesus cultivates into disciples and friends.

You may remember from three weeks ago that Jesus told the Samaritan woman about living water that leads to worshipping God in spirit and in truth. He also told his disciples, after the foot washing of Thursday evening's text, "I am the way, the truth, and the life." Jesus never calls himself soil, but he does talk about himself as the vine, and us as the branches. So I think it also works to think of us his disciples as seedlings and of him as the soil we are planted in, watered by the living water of Holy Baptism, which we affirmed last night at the Vigil, gathered around the font.

Jesus is the truth that we are planted in. But this is not truth that we can grab ahold of and possess. Jesus does not let Mary hold him. So it's also not something we can shove down people's throats. Nor is it truth that can be weaponized in the pursuit of other agendas. It is only truth that can be lived out of, through faith that God alone can give.

Jesus' resurrection in the garden means that it's gardening season again. And this time, by the grace of God and the work of the Holy Spirit, we're going to get it right.

So Let's say it again. Christ is risen, alleluia! (Christ is risen indeed! Alleluia!) May we live out of that truth, and may the peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep our hearts and minds in the same Christ Jesus unto life everlasting. Amen.