

Easter Sunday – April 5, 2026
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.

Easter happens every year at the beginning of gardening season. 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 up on that 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. And that explains why 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. She's in a garden, after all. And it was very early morning, maybe still dark, or just beginning twilight. Who else would be there? Not Jesus, of course. Mary 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 into this garden tomb. So she *knows* that this isn't Jesus. That's "her truth," as we have become fond of saying. 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 four years of open warfare in Ukraine, and killed an estimated 1.3 million people. And that's just on the Russian side. But we have had our own struggle with truth in the leadership of our country in recent years, haven't we? 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 from John 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 been proclaiming, starting last night at the Easter Vigil and continuing this morning. (There's more of that to come.) This proclamation 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 John sets Jesus' resurrection and the new life it brings in a garden. John began his Gospel with a retelling of the first creation story from Genesis chapter one, in which Jesus himself is the creating word that spoke the world into existence. Now here at the end of his Gospel John is evoking the second creation story from Genesis chapter two. In that story God planted a garden

between the rivers and brought forth life: plants, humans, and the other animals. And then God tasked the humans with tending the garden.

So, 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 later helped to place Jesus' body in the tomb, the Samaritan woman at the well, the man born blind, and finally Jesus' friends Mary and Martha, and their brother Lazarus. All of these, and the others whose lives Jesus touched, Jesus was cultivating into disciples and friends.

You may remember from three weeks ago that Jesus told the Samaritan woman about living water that connects us to God in spirit and in truth, and that never runs dry. 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, and by which we welcomed five new members into our community of faith here at Grace.

If Jesus is the truth that we are planted in, then this truth is not something that we can grab ahold of and possess. Jesus does not let Mary hold him. He is not "her" truth – or maybe I should say, not her truth alone. The truth that is Jesus is not something we can possess, or control, or manipulate, or tribalize to serve our selfish purposes and agendas. Not that we won't try. People have been trying to coopt Jesus starting already in the pages of scripture and continuing throughout history down to our own day. And nowhere is that cooption more on display right now than when the cross gets drafted into the service of nationalism, nativism, and greed.

If Jesus is the soil that we are planted in, or the vine that we are connected to, then we don't hold Jesus, Jesus holds us. And if Jesus is the truth as he claimed, and as we therefore claim also, then that 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. It is creation 2.0. And in this new creation, by the grace of God and the work of the Holy Spirit, we are going to flourish.

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.