

## **Easter Service – 9:30**

Aren't gardens beautiful places?

The Gospel reading you just heard took place in a garden.

I am sure it was a beautiful garden. Lots of flowers, lots of plants, full of color and life.

And in the middle of all this life, was a tomb. A tomb where they laid Jesus after he was crucified.

The night before Jesus died, he was in a different garden.

Listen to Matthew 26:36-39.

We all have moments of weakness. Every one of us. Even Jesus – the part of him that was human – went to the garden and prayed to God in his time of need.

I think we all have felt like we've been in the Garden of Gethsemane at some point in our lives. Not sure where to turn – feeling like there is no way out. Looking for answers.

When Jesus felt that way, he turned to God – asking God for help. But then He said in his prayer –

“Not what I want, God, but what you want.”

But God doesn't leave us in the garden alone. Although there was much pain and heartache in the garden on that first Easter morning, the garden takes on a bit of a change for us.

In the Gospel of John we can read how a few of the disciples found the tomb empty. Here they were standing in a tomb – a symbol of death – in the middle of a garden – which is full of life.

The reading Barry read for us said that Mary didn't recognize Jesus -- and at first thought he was the gardener! Which I guess in a way, she was right. Doesn't a gardener love things in the earth and make things grow and live? In a way, a gardener gives life to other things.

But in this instance, it was the gardener himself that was brought to life. In a place that was marked by death, it is now full of life. What was quiet in death is now loudly proclaiming, "Mary! It's me!"

What was filled with despair has turned to hope.

Mary knew now that there was hope for the world. She probably still didn't grasp what was going on, but definitely something was happening by the hand of God.

There was no doubt in her mind that Jesus had died the night before. She saw him beaten and then hung on that cross. She had seen his side being pierced. She even saw them carry his lifeless body away and stood there as a large rock was moved in front of it, sealing the tomb.

She knew Jesus had died. But here he was, as good as new. Saying that he was about to ascend to the father – and he said, “Go tell the disciples that I have risen and I am here.”

What a great message of hope! What a great message to be shared.

The Bible tells us that she shared the message with the disciples and in one account they just laughed at her and didn't really believe her – they doubted, they weren't really sure.

That is until Jesus appeared to them – and their reaction went from, “okay, maybe Christ is risen” to “Christ is Risen Indeed!”

When there is no doubt in our hearts or our minds, our life changes. We don't simply say to ourselves or anyone else that Christ is Risen, but we say it with conviction, we say Christ is Truly Risen – or Christ is Risen Indeed.

When you have that kind of faith you stand by it no matter what. Legend has it that Mary Magdalene went to a party held by the Emperor Tiberius and took an egg with her. The egg stood for new life and Christ bursting out of the tomb.

The tradition says that she stood there and held the egg out in front of her and said to the Emperor, "Christ is Risen".

What a belief she must have had – what conviction she had. She knew in her heart that Christ was risen indeed. She could have been put to death for confronting the Emperor that way.

So, because of her strong beliefs, she stood there holding out an egg to the emperor proclaiming that Christ is Risen. And, according to legend, the Emperor's response was laughter. He went on to say that Christ rising from the dead was as likely as the egg in her hand turning red while she held it.

And, according to legend, before he finished speaking, the egg in her hand turned a bright red.

Now this is just folklore, it is not in the Bible, and it may or may not be true – we'll never know. But I like the story. I like the symbolism of the egg that we color on Easter celebrating new life with Jesus and symbolizing, just like a chick bursting from the egg, Jesus bursting from the tomb.

New life with Jesus – that's what he is offering us. By going to the cross, he died for our sins, our transgressions. We should and we need to feel comfortable turning those sins over to him – praying to Him and asking him to forgive us of our sins, forgive us of our guilt. Allow ourselves to have new life with him.

By turning towards Christ, and having new life with him, we can enjoy the gift of salvation he brings to us. By keeping God in our lives, we aren't alone. No matter if we are in a garden, or at work, or in the grocery store, we aren't alone.

The Easter message is a message of new hope, new life, new beginnings. I invite all of us to embrace Christ and the gift he gives each of us. Because Christ is Risen – He is Risen Indeed.

For us – Holy Communion is a way for us to experience Christ. Through Holy Communion we remember the breaking of His body, and the suffering he endured. But by receiving Communion, we reflect that Christ is alive in this world today.

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