

*Based on John 20:11-16. Mary supposes Jesus to be the gardener.
Also based on Littlefoot, 19, by Charles Wright. "The bird hour."*

In my family, my husband is the gardener.

This time of year has him in his element. Every time I turn around he has a new project to show off. *Honey, I have something to show you*, he'll say, with a big grin on his face. *The raised beds need more sunlight so I moved them to a new location*. *Darling*, he will say, with a hint of pride, *Did you see, the raspberry patch was way overgrown, so I gave it a trim?* *Sweetheart*, he will say, asking forgiveness rather than permission, *I had to move the fence so I could plant three more blueberry bushes, I hope that's okay*. And my personal favorite, he shouts with glee: *Look, honey, we are going to have peaches this year!*

Clearly my husband delights in his gardening. And I delight in his delight! Right up until it is time to crunch the numbers. *Honey-bun?* my husband will venture, with those puppy dog eyes that always win me over, *how much can we spend on mulch this year?* *Sweetie pie*, he will ask, after he's done a big pile of my laundry and even folded it for me, *what kind of fencing do you think we can afford?* *Love of my life*, he will say, (when he knows for sure the answer will be, *no!*) *it would really help if I could have a backhoe, just a small one, to help with the digging*.

And of course, with the exception of the backhoe, which he can rent instead of own, we find a way to make a way to pay what it takes to make the garden grow. It is good for us. It is good for the soil. It is good for the soul.

Which is why, when we hear on this Easter Sunday in the familiar story from John's Gospel, that Mary Magdalene supposes Jesus to be a *gardener*, something in me pays attention. There is, in fact, a *garden* surrounding the empty tomb. Someone - or someones - cares for that garden, the same way my husband cares for ours. Someone - or someones - finances that garden, makes choices about fencing and pruning and backhoe-ing. Someone - or someones - finds a way to make a way to pay what it takes to make the garden grow. Because this garden is good for them and for the soil and for the soul.

It makes sense, then, that Mary Magdalene plants herself in that garden, overtaken with grief, once Peter and the other disciple have headed back home. They may have been able to turn on a dime, but she cannot go there just yet. The wounds of the week are still too fresh. The heartbreak is still too intense. The garden is the only place that makes sense in this moment.

Ah, but this moment, in the words of our poet, just happens to be *the bird hour!* As Mary stays weeping outside the empty tomb, *the singular song of the tiny chirper, lost in the loose leaves of the weeping cherry tree* echoes her longing. Hedges host sparrows and other feathery things. Peony blossoms fall on railroad ties. Strengthened now by this Garden of Grace, Mary bends over to look into the tomb. Two angels in white sit where the body of Jesus had been lying. The Garden of Grace is working is magic.

Turning around, Mary sees the risen Christ. She supposes him to be the gardener. In Greek the word is *Garden Keeper*, or *Garden Guardian*. The one who makes sure the garden is okay. And perhaps the title fits the risen Christ, after all. Life does begin, in Genesis at least, in a garden. With *every tree pleasant to the sight and good for food*. Including a tree of life, as well as a tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

The cross assures us we sure do know evil. But Easter assures us the tree of life still stands! On Easter Jesus finds himself in another Garden of Grace, on the other side of so much evil, tending that tree of life! Easter insists that neither you nor I nor anything else in all creation can ever cut down that tree of life, no matter how much evil we inflict upon one another! Easter insists the tree of life will stay standing, as long as a Garden Keeper remains to make it so.

In a sense, Jesus has been a Garden Keeper his entire life. The whole point of his ministry, we could say, has been to re-plant over and over again that very first Garden of Grace within us and among us and beyond us, with a tree of life at its center. When he calls Simon and Peter and James and John and you and me to a mission bigger than ourselves, Jesus plants a seed in the Garden of Grace, with a tree of life at its center. When he preaches and teaches and heals those who hurt, including you and me, Jesus plants a seed in the Garden of Grace, with a tree of life at its center. When he touches the outcast and eats with sinners, including dare I say you and me, Jesus plants a seed in the Garden of Grace, with a tree of life at its center. When he feeds five thousand and convinces a tax collector to repay his extortion, Jesus plants a seed in the Garden of Grace, with a tree of life at its center. And when he calls Mary by name and reminds her in who she really is in the time of her greatest grief, Jesus plants a seed in the Garden of Grace, with a tree of life at its center.

It turns out, on Easter Sunday, Jesus really is The Gardener. But that is not. Mary calls him, *Rabbouni*, my Teacher, and she learns her lesson well.

You, Mary, Jesus says to her on Easter Sunday morning, *you* are the gardener now. *You* are the one who must tend this tree of life. *You* are the one who must plant the seeds of grace. *You* are the one who must find a way to make a way to pay what it takes to make the garden grow. *That* is what resurrection is really all about!

You do not have to do it alone, Jesus says to Mary on Easter Sunday morning. Go and tell the others. They are co-gardeners with you! And indeed we all are. The point of resurrection is to teach *all of us* to plant seeds in the Garden of Grace. That is how we keep the tree of life flourishing even in the midst of the knowledge of so much evil. That is how we find a way to re-ignite our delight. That is what it means to be the church.

Honey-bun, the risen Christ says to us, *sweetheart, darling*, the risen Christ says: look how much fun it is to grow a Garden of Grace! Don't you want to join me? And we get to say a resounding, *yes!*

Every time we turn the Fellowship Hall into a Hospitality Suite, we plant a seed in the Garden of Grace, with a tree of life at its center. Every time we pray for peace with our poster board or with a phone call to our Congressional Delegation, we plant a seed in the Garden of Grace, with a tree of life at its center. Every time we help a transgender person transition or speak the truth of our same gender spouse, we plant a seed in the Garden

of Grace, with a tree of life at its center. Every time we turn a gun into a gardening tool, we plant a seed in the Garden of Grace, with a tree of life at its center. Every time we sing with the birds, even if we cannot carry a tune in a bucket, we plant a seed in the Garden of Grace, with a tree of life at its center. And every time we remind someone who they really are in their time of greatest grief, we plant a seed in the Garden of Grace, with a tree of life at its center.

This time of year has the church in our element. Every time we turn around, we have a new project to show off. We will find a way to make a way to pay what it takes to make the garden grow. Because this garden is good for us and it is good for the soil and it is good for the soul.