

The Reverend Joshua H. Narcisse  
Sunday, May 18, 2025

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**And There Christ Will Meet You: In The Garden**

**John 20:11-18**

*But Mary stood weeping outside the tomb. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb, and she saw two angels in white sitting where the body of Jesus had been lying, one at the head and the other at the feet. They said to her, “Woman, why are you weeping?” She said to them, “They have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid him.” When she had said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not know that it was Jesus.*

*Jesus said to her, “Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you looking for?” Supposing him to be the gardener, she said to him, “Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away.”*

*Jesus said to her, “Mary!” She turned and said to him in Hebrew, “Rabbouni!” (which means Teacher). Jesus said to her, “Do not touch me, because I have not yet ascended to the Father. But go to my brothers and say to them, ‘I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.’” Mary Magdalene went and announced to the disciples, “I have seen the Lord,” and she told them that he had said these things to her.*

Beloved, as we continue along in our journey through Eastertide, we continue, also our sermon series: *And There Christ Will Meet You* reflecting on the ways and the places where we encounter our resurrected Lord. If you’ve been with us the past 3 weeks, then you’ve heard our Seniors proclaim the uncertain and unexpected ways we encounter Christ on the road to Emmaus.

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You've heard Pastor Courtney invite us to have breakfast with Christ by the sea, and find a different pace in the midst of our too-much, too-soon, too-fast world and the wounds it brings that overwhelm us and distract us from the work of resurrection.

And then last week you heard Pastor Mary invite us into the meadow where we encounter Christ as the Good Shepherd whose voice we must hear and head amidst all the other voices clamoring for our attention, amidst all the other voices trying to convince us that we don't have to practice resurrection each and every day of our lives.

Emmaus. By the Sea. In the Meadow. Now we come to the Garden.

Beloved, if you've been to enough Sunday School, then you know that Matthew, Mark, and Luke cheated on their Gospel writing exam. They are Synoptic Gospels, meaning they see the ministry of Jesus from a common perspective, they share a similar point of view from which they tell the story. But John, John is a bit of a loner, John didn't use the same exact study guide, and John is not just trying to ace the Gospel writing exam, he's trying to make a point.

And so, if you've listened to enough sermons and read enough Scripture, you know that John includes different details and different events, and tells the story in a different way than Matthew, Mark and Luke. And the same is true for John's accounting of the resurrection.

All four Gospels agree that Jesus was crucified and then taken down from the cross. All four Gospels agree that Jesus was wrapped in a linen cloth. All four Gospels agree that Jesus was laid in Joseph of Arimathea's tomb. All four Gospels agree that Mary is among the first disciples to go to that tomb on Sunday morning. But only John's Gospel tells us that tomb was located in a garden.

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That's what John tells us in the preceding chapter and 41st verse, that "there was a garden in the place where [Jesus] was crucified, and in the garden there was a new tomb in which no one had ever been laid." And that's important Beloved, because it sets a very different scene as we meet Christ, this week in the garden.

We talk about the scene of that Easter morning being dark, we talk about the lingering terror in the air, we talk about the grief that still grips the disciples hearts, we talk about the shocking, rupturing, rending reality of the crucifixion and how it still didn't feel real, how it just wasn't comprehensible, possible, acceptable, that Mary was on her way to see Jesus her teacher now claimed by a tomb.

We tell the story of that Easter morning and its devastation. But we rarely tell the part of the story that mentions the beauty surrounding this site of brutality. We rarely tell the part of our story that recounts the peace that intersected our insurmountable pain. We rarely recall that the place where they crucified Christ also contains a garden. That is the scene John paints of that first Easter morning, that is where we find Mary in our text this day, in a garden that also holds a grave.

I have often imagined Mary on that first Easter morning bereft, a tear-washed face, hair matted under its covering, lips chapped from all the crying, sore from the way your muscles ache when they've been called upon to help you weep after you can't cry anymore and the rest of the body has to pick up where you tears left off.

I have often imagined Mary on that first Easter morning looking like what she's been through—death, hell, and the grave. And in that way of imagining the story, I have forgotten that

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she comes looking for a crucified Christ, as a grief gripped disciple, in the midst of a lush garden.

And I've got to be honest, that is not what I expect. That is not what I expected a grave to look like. That is not how I expected the aftermath of terror and trauma to appear. That is not where I expected Christ who was crucified, died, and was buried, to meet Mary, let alone me after everything falls apart.

It's one thing to, in the words of my forebears in the faith, expect to meet Jesus as a "doctor in the sickroom and a lawyer in the courtroom." It's one thing to expect Jesus to be a "friend to the friendless, and a mother to the motherless." It's one thing to expect Jesus to be a "heart-fixer and a mind-regulator."

But after everything has been taken from you. When you bump up against some stuff that seemingly can't be fixed, can't be changed, can't be reversed.

When the sickness came and claimed your independence. When you've lost sight of your sense of purpose. When the layoff notice landed in your inbox. When the shame of it all caused people to act like they didn't even know your name. When the addiction beat you and you didn't beat it. When you found out the rules you were living by weren't the rules everyone else was following. When the doctor came to inform you that they were dead. When everything has been taken from you, why would you expect to see anything other than the grave, why would you notice a garden?

Beloved, that is why it's important we tell the whole story, because it helps us get a fuller sense of what the angels meant when they proclaimed "and there you will see him." It helps us

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get a fuller sense of what it means to meet Christ in the places where he promises he will find us, especially when we find ourselves in those places and can't see anything through the fog of all we're carrying.

Mary is a good stand in for each of us. Mary is carrying the trauma of watching public execution. She's carrying the fear of being snatched off the streets of Jerusalem because she shares an identity with her refugee Rabbi who exposed the inhumanity of Roman rule. She's carrying the grief of one who lost a beloved. And for all she is carrying, she has come to see the grave where they laid him, and perhaps can't see the garden that surrounds her.

Beloved, what are you carrying this morning? What is it that has so completely captured your attention, and claimed your vision, and drowned out every other sound, that you, like Mary, don't recognize Jesus right next to you? What is it that you're carrying this morning that has convinced you, the only way you'll experience relief, the only way peace can be possible, the only way that healing can happen, the only way that grief can be carried, that the only place to look for Jesus, is where the grave still reigns supreme?

Mary comes to a place awash with life looking for a grave, Mary comes looking for death, Mary comes weeping and bereft and disconsolate. And I don't judge her for doing so. And Beloved neither does Jesus.

The text tells us that when Mary arrives with her tears the angels ask her "Woman, why are you weeping?" She shares her fears, she shares her pain, she shares what she expected concerning her beloved Teacher. And then Jesus appears, but not in a way Mary can recognize,

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not in a way Mary anticipates, not in a way Mary has enough strength to see, and Jesus asks her the same question, “Woman, why are you weeping?” Leave it to Jesus to be redundant.

But then he asks a second question, that makes all the difference, that exposes us and helps us all at the same time, “Woman , why are you weeping? *Whom are you looking for?*”

Beloved, that second question is a gift. That’s a gift to us, that’s Good News to us this day, because it gives us a chance to check in with ourselves, and consider whom we are looking for when we say we are looking for God to show up.

That’s Good News to us, Beloved, because every now and again we need to reckon with what we mean when we claim we are looking for God to make a way in our lives.

It’s Good News to us Beloved, because it gives us an opportunity to take the broad view when we look for God in the midst of our stories. Where have you stopped looking for God in your life? Where have you stopped expecting God to be able to show up?

I know it makes more sense that God would be in the grave rather than taking in the beauty of the garden. It’s more logical, it’s safer to expect so little from God than to ever trust God again after everything that you had hoped for didn’t pan out.

I know that the situation you’re still navigating lowered your expectations of God and it makes sense that God would be there to wipe away your tears, but it’s hard to expect God to bring you joy again.

I know the uncertainty of this season is all your mind can focus on, and it makes sense that God would be there to hold you through your sleepless nights, but it’s hard to expect God to still be there when a new morning comes or that the sun would ever shine again.

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I know what you saw scarred you, I know what you endured broke you, I know what you needed and didn't get disappointed you, and it makes sense that God would be there to sooth your broken heart, but it's hard to expect God can still keep God's promises when all that's left are the broken pieces of what you couldn't hold together on your own.

Listen to Jesus ask you the question he asked Mary, Beloved, whom are you looking for, really? What are you searching for, truly searching for? Can you recognize it?

The blessing for us in the text this day, is that Jesus knows that sometimes we can't. Sometimes, no matter how near God's presence is to us, no matter how close what we are looking for is to us, we can't recognize it. And so, the Good Shepherd calls our name. The one who meets us in our too-much, too-soon, too-fast world, calls us to the shoreline, breaks the rhythm of our lives and reminds us that we are resurrection people. The one who meets us along the road, shares a table with us, and opens our eyes for us, so that we can recognize just how close we are to whom we're looking for and what we're searching for.

It's right there where Mary is, what's she's literally looking for is surrounding her, whom she's searching for is standing next to her, and she can't see it. And that's ok, because that's quite literally outside of her ability to do so, and it's outside of our ability as well.

And that's ok, for the promise is not that if we look hard enough, if we believe completely enough, if we trust totally enough it will all work out and we'll find what we're looking for, we'll see God where we expected.

No Beloved, the promise is that if we show up where Christ is calling us to go, there Christ will meet us, Christ will find us, Christ will call our name, and there we will see him, in

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the garden and the grave, on the cross and at the communion table, in life and in death, we will see him and the power of his resurrection. Not in the way we've come to expect, not always in ways we can recognize, but we will see Christ where he promised and that's Good News, to the glory of God, Amen.