

**Easter Day  
St. Anne's Episcopal Church  
Lee's Summit, Missouri**

**John 20:1-18**

*Come, Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful people and kindle in them the fire of your love. AMEN.*

**After these things, Joseph of Arimathea, who was a disciple of Jesus, though a secret one because of his fear of the Jews, asked Pilate to let him take away the body of Jesus. Pilate gave him permission; so he came and removed his body. Nicodemus, who had at first come to Jesus by night, also came, bringing a mixture of myrrh and aloes, weighing about a hundred pounds. They took the body of Jesus and wrapped it with the spices in linen cloths, according to the burial custom of the Jews. Now there was a garden in the place where he was crucified, and in the garden there was a new tomb in which no one had ever been laid. And so, because it was the Jewish day of Preparation, and the tomb was nearby, they laid Jesus there.**

Now there was a garden in the place where he was crucified, and in the garden there was a new tomb... (and) they laid Jesus there.

There's hardly any place I'd rather be than in a garden. Whether it's my own less than perfect garden with my hands covered in dirt and my shoes sticky with mud or a fabulously perfect big public garden, walking along the well-manicured paths and reading the little tags telling me the name of each plant along the way.

You've probably seen one of those signs that are sometimes placed in gardens...

The kiss of the sun for pardon,  
The song of the birds for mirth,  
One is nearer to God's heart in the garden  
Than anywhere else on earth.

For me, it's more than a cute little poem to hang in the garden. For me, it's absolute truth. Because a garden – surrounded by the bright colors of flowers, the smell of dirt, the light of the sun, and the song of the birds, God's lovely creations – that's usually where I feel closest to God.

So, when I read on Good Friday that Jesus' body was laid in a tomb located in a garden near where he was crucified, somehow that just seemed right to me.

And now on Easter morning, we return to the garden.

Very early on Sunday morning while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene came to the garden where Jesus had been entombed. Can you imagine going out alone in the dark to the tomb of someone who had just been executed by the Roman Empire? It had to be more than a little scary for more than one reason. But, she went there anyway.

Maybe you know that incredible pull of wanting to be near the grave of someone you love who has died.

But much to her surprise, the stone that had covered the door to the tomb had been removed. She ran to tell Peter and another disciple – the one we know only as “the one whom Jesus loved.”

The three rushed back to the tomb. The male disciples found no body in the tomb, only the linen with which Jesus' body had been wrapped. Then Peter and the disciple Jesus loved left the tomb and went back home, not knowing quite what to make of this unusual and disturbing scene.

But Mary, Mary stayed behind. Crying perhaps because she was sad at the loss of her friend Jesus or crying perhaps because his body had been snatched away or crying perhaps because she was so utterly confused, Mary Magdalene stayed at the tomb.

But then, after two angels asked her why she was crying and they had a conversation with her about the whereabouts of Jesus' body, she saw Jesus, the one whom she had seen nailed to a cross only a few days before.

Oh, she didn't recognize him at first; she thought he was the one who tended the garden.

**Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you looking for?**

And the grieving Mary responded,

*Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away.*

Just then, Jesus spoke her name – Mary. Mary.

And, she immediately knew that voice and called out to him “Rabbouni!”

Rabbouni – a form of endearment for rabbi, teacher, or master. Mary answered this voice of the one she loved with deep affection and recognition, “Dear teacher.”

Mary recognized Jesus because he called her by name.

Jesus, the Good Shepherd. The one who loves his sheep, the one who knows each of them, the one who calls each of them by name and leads them.

And, Mary Magdalene. One of the Master's sheep who recognize his voice and know him. Mary, this one whose grief has been turned to unspeakable joy.

Jesus told her to go to his brothers and tell them that he was ascending to the Father. So, she went and announced to the disciples, "I have seen the Lord."

And, with this incredible announcement, the previously grieving Mary Magdalene becomes the joyful apostle to the apostles.

Over the past several years, I have been a part of groups that have visited nursing homes to worship with those who can no longer be in church on Sunday morning, but who nonetheless continue to have a strong faith and a strong desire to worship God with other Christians.

We currently have one of these groups here at St. Anne's. And, one Sunday afternoon each month, we worship God with our older friends at the John Knox Village Care Center.

One of the things we do during these visits is to sing some of the old hymns that many of our friends know by heart. One of the hymns that I know will always get a positive reaction is one you have probably heard. It is called, "In the Garden."

**I come to the garden alone  
While the dew is still on the roses  
And the voice I hear, falling on my ear  
The Son of God discloses**

**And He walks with me  
And He talks with me  
And He tells me I am His own  
And the joy we share as we tarry there  
None other has ever known**

For these older men and women who have walked and talked with Jesus all their lives, who have heard the risen Christ call their names, these words seem to speak to something deep, deep within them. To speak to a place where age or infirmity or even dementia cannot take these words away. For those of you who are in our group, I'm guessing you might have seen this, too.

This old hymn was written by Charles Austin Miles in 1913. In his own words, he gave the background to this hymn.

**"I read the story of the greatest morn in history. The first day of the week cometh Mary Magdalene early, while it was yet very dark, unto the sepulcher. Instantly, completely, there unfolded in my mind the scenes of the garden, where out of the mists comes a form, halting, hesitating, tearful, seeking, turning from side to side in bewildering amazement.  
"Falteringly, bearing grief in every accent, with tear-dimmed eyes, she whispers, 'If Thou has borne Him hence.'  
"He speaks, and the sound of His voice is so sweet the birds hush their singing. He said to her "Mary!"  
"Just one word and forgotten are the heartaches, the long dreary hours, all the past blotted out in His presence."**

This morning the risen Christ calls each of our names. The Good Shepherd walks among us and speaks to us in words and in ways that each of us can hear.

So, today, go to the garden – go to that place where you feel closest to God. Listen for the call of this Good Shepherd - this one who loves each of us as if there were none other to love and who loves all of us as he loves each of us.

Grief turned to joy. The dark of Good Friday turned to the light of Easter Morning.

Alleluia. Christ is risen.

The Lord is risen indeed. Alleluia.

AMEN.