

E-Series

Easter and The Gardener



1 Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene went to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the entrance. 2 So she came running to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one Jesus loved, and said, "They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we don't know where they have put him!" 3 So Peter and the other disciple started for the tomb... 10 Then the disciples went back to their homes, 11 but Mary stood outside the tomb crying. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb 12 and saw two angels in white, seated where Jesus' body had been, one at the head and the other at the foot. 13 They

*asked her, "Woman, why are you crying?" "They have taken my Lord away," she said, "and I don't know where they have put him." 14 At this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not realize that it was Jesus. 15 "Woman," he said, "why are you crying? Who is it you are looking for?" **Thinking he was the gardener**, she said, "Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have put him, and I will get him." 16 Jesus said to her, "Mary." She turned toward him and cried out in Aramaic, "Rabboni!" (which means Teacher). —John 20:1-3, 10-16*

Happy Easter! Yes, I have looked at a calendar. I know that Easter Sunday was eight days ago, but we are still squarely in the Season of Easter. Easter is far from over (more on that later in the week).

This year my imagination has been captured by John's rendition of Easter. John gives us a good number of details that are not included in any of the other Gospels. For example, only John tells us this, "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" (19:41). And only John tells us that Mary Magdalene, upon seeing Jesus for the first time after the resurrection, thinks he is "the gardener."

Quite an interesting detail, don't you think? I wondered: Did gardeners make it a habit of hanging out in cemeteries? Or, were gardeners notorious for stealing bodies out of tombs in this day and time? Why would Mary have seen Jesus and mistaken him for a gardener? More than that, why—when there are so many other important details to include about such an amazing story—did John see fit to tell us about Mary's "mistake."

Maybe because it was **not** a mistake.

In his book, *Velvet Elvis: Repainting the Christian Faith*, Rob Bell discusses this passage. He suggests that when we come across an odd or very interesting detail like this, we should use the "principle of first mention" (*Velvet Elvis*, p. 156). According to Bell, oftentimes there is much to glean by looking up the first instance of a word or phrase in the Bible. He doesn't say why, but I think it is because the New Testament writers knew the Old Testament so thoroughly. Their minds were inundated with the OT, and they often make allusions—sometimes subtle allusions—to the OT.

Back to the gardener and the garden. You don't have to look very hard for the first instance of the word "garden." It's right there in the first couple of chapters of the book of Genesis. Genesis 2:8 says, "Now, God planted a garden in the east, in Eden, and there he placed the man that he had formed." God planted a garden. God is the Gardener in Genesis.

As I said on Easter Sunday, this makes a lot of sense. Remember, John is the Gospel writer who chose to begin his gospel about Jesus with these words, "In the beginning..." Sound familiar? It's the exact same way that Genesis begins. John says, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God and the Word was God. He was in the beginning and through him all things were made." Later John says, "And the Word became flesh and lived among us." There's no doubt that the Word is Jesus. And there's no doubt that Jesus was there at the creation of the world in the very beginning—in fact, John tells us that creation came into being through him.

So, really Mary is right. When John tells us that Mary thinks that Jesus is the gardener, she's not confused. She is exactly right. Jesus is the one who planted a garden all the way back at the beginning.

The same God who created way back in the beginning was determined not to let sin and death forever ruin his creation. He was determined not to let sin and death have the last word. So in a garden, in the very place where sin and death entered the world in the first place, the Gardener, once and for all, defeats them. In his resurrection Jesus, the Good Gardener, is knocking the teeth out of sin and taking the sting out of death. The weeds of sin and death have been pulled up by the roots by the only one who can do it, the Good Gardener.

Thanks be to God! Happy Easter!

Reveling in the Resurrection,
Pastor Michael



Time to Shine in 2009!