

Our story begins with a tree and a garden. On the first day of the week, in the early hours of the morning. The darkness of the Sabbath day still clung to the trees and blades of grass just as it still hung on the face and soul of Mary as she made her way through the garden. It was as if the Cross where Jesus had died was still casting a shadow upon the world. The light of the dawn however, was beginning to break through the darkness of the previous night, the dome of the sky was a palette of colours as rays of the sun painted the sky in deep purples, reds and oranges, though the moon and stars still hung in the sky, as the sun had not yet crested the horizon. Mary was oblivious to the sky, oblivious to the beauty of the morning before her, as she trudged through the garden heavy-laden in grief, with the spectre of death still hanging on her soul from the brutal loss of her Lord less than two days before. As she approached closer to the tomb where they had laid Jesus, Mary passed by a stream of water bubbling up from the earth, around the stream was a great panoply of blooming flowers and vegetation fig trees and wild olive trees were reveling in the seeming vibrancy of the morning. Just as the tomb was coming into her sight, the first rays of the sun began to crest over the horizon, with the moon and the stars of night finally giving way to the great light of the day time. As the rays of the sun cast their light upon the tomb where Jesus was laid, a pair of sparrows began to trill in cool morning air, singing their praises to the new day. Grief still hung upon Mary like a millstone, as she was shocked to see that the stone which had been placed at the entrance.

Mary's grief was now mixed with shock, as she ran as fast as she could to tell Peter and the other disciples what she thought she had seen, that they had moved their Lord, and she did not know where they had laid him. As the disciples came and went, seeing nothing but linen cloths in the tomb, Mary descended deeper into grief than before. Not only was Jesus dead, but now someone had stolen his body, someone had removed even the last vestiges of him that Mary was hoping to cling to. Around her all of Creation was vibrantly alive, singing its praises in the glorious morning light, but all Mary could do was weep. In her tears she mustered up the courage to look once more into the tomb, the last place where Jesus had been laid. The linen cloths were the final threads of connection to the man she had declared was her Lord, the last connection to the man who had saved her and who she had believed would liberate her once again.

As she peered into the tomb, she was dazzled by a wondrous and holy light as two angels appeared where Jesus' head and feet and lain mere days before. She turned from the angels, unable to face the light and saw a man standing there, a man who looked vaguely familiar but completely foreign to her at the same time. The man spoke to her in a soft and loving voice, "Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you looking for?" To Mary the man appeared to be the gardener, and so supposing he knew what happened this garden which he tended, she asked him between deep sobs "If you have carried him away, tell me where you laid him, and I will take him away!" All Mary wanted was to cling to her memories of Jesus, to honour the memory of the man who she loved, and who she had followed all the way to the foot of the Cross. In response to her question the man's face softened into an inviting and warm smile and he said to her "Mary!"

In an instant the world around Mary was changed, she could finally hear the birds raising their voices to praise the Lord of all Creation, she could see that the flowers were just a little brighter than before as they swayed to welcome their God, and the sky was filled with vibrant colours like banners to welcome a returning and triumphant King, and the Sun's rays showered down upon Jesus enveloping him in brilliant hues, brighter and more magnificent than any cloth or gem on earth could adorn him. Mary ran to her Lord to take hold of him, but his response was to say to her "Do not hold onto to me, for I have not ascended to the Father. But go and tell my brothers what you have seen."

Our story is the story of a Garden and a Tree. This is our story too. Just as in the book of Genesis all of Creation begins with a garden, the Garden of Eden and at the centre of that Garden are the Tree of Good and Evil and the Tree of Life, so too does our Story, the story of Jesus Christ, the story of our faith, the story of the New Creation begin with a Garden and a Tree. The Tree is the Cross where Jesus was crucified, the Garden is his tomb. The story of Easter, the story we celebrate today is the story of this

Garden and this Tree, the story of a Tree which leads to this Garden with tomb in middle of it, the story where this tomb is found empty and the story where this Cross ultimately becomes for us the Tree of Life and everything, and I mean everything is changed forever.

Like Mary in the Garden that day, sometimes the sting of the Cross weighs heavily upon us. Sometimes we cannot fathom the death and destruction we witness in the world. Like Mary, we can look upon the massacre of 147 Christians in Kenya this week and see only a hopeless and endless cycle of death before us. Like Mary we can experience moments of deep personal loss and sadness, and see no light at the end of the tunnel, no hope of the good news to come. Like Mary we can cling to anything that reminds us of good times now past, we can cling to social markers of success (happiness, wealth, prestige, power) that make us feel better in our greatest moments of vulnerability. Through all of this we hope for some magic trick to make things better, we hope for God to snap his fingers and right all the wrongs in the world.

The resurrection of Jesus, however is not a magic trick that God performed with skin and bones. It is not merely Jesus escaping the sharpness of death on the Cross. The resurrection is not God reversing a mistake that needed to be corrected, it is not a detour in his great plan of Creation and redemption. The resurrection isn't even just Jesus coming back from the dead, it isn't just a miracle that God preformed. No, the resurrection is the revelation that love is stronger than death, that even death holds no power over God's creative forces of love and mercy in the universe. That the sting of death cannot separate us from God, and that it cannot separate us from his love made known to us in Jesus Christ. The resurrection is the revelation that things we cling to: success, power, accolades, are nothing in the face of God, and the resurrection tells us that human worth is not indexed to worldly success. In the Tree and the Garden we discover that we are loved and wanted simply because of who we are, simply because we are human and not because of what we can achieve, not because of the successes we have. In the Tree and the Garden we come to know that there is nothing we can do to make God love us anymore or any less. In dealing with Sin once and for all on the Cross, God transforms this brutal instrument of torture into the very Tree of Life, and so it becomes for us the first fruits of a new and renewed Creation.

This is what the Christian life is all about: it is about entering with Jesus into his death upon the Tree of Life and into the Garden of New Creation. It is about embracing our weakness, embracing our raw humanity, without any of the facades or dressings we put on in daily life. It is about embracing the death of our false pretensions and aspirations so that we might receive the love and mercy of God, metaphorically naked before him with nothing getting in the way, just as Adam and Eve communed with God in the Garden of Eden. As we embrace the Tree of Life, the Cross we too can experience the vibrancy of the New Creation, we too can experience the renewed life emanating from the Garden and out throughout the world.

In the Church we celebrate entrance into the renewed life in the sacrament of baptism. In the liturgy of the Book of Alternative Services, a liturgy we will celebrate later this morning, we hear that in baptism we are buried with Christ in his death. We hear that in baptism we share in his resurrection, and finally that through baptism we are reborn into the new life by the Holy Spirit. While we share in Christ's death and resurrection, we cannot stay there clinging to him, just as Jesus told Mary that she could not hold on to him and he sent her to leave that glorious transformed Garden with a job to tell her brothers about the risen Lord, so too Jesus tells us that we cannot spend our lives clinging to him, we cannot stay in the Garden forever, but rather we are called to go out and share with the world the Good News of Easter, the Good News that God loves us no matter who we are or what we've done, the Good News that there is nothing we can do to make God love us the any more or any less, the Good News that today Christ is Risen! He is Risen indeed! Alleluia, Alleluia, Alleluia!