

“Awaken Creation to the Meet the New Dawn!”

John 20: 1-18

Over the last six weeks, we have traveled with the elements of God’s creation as our guides for our Lenten journey. On this journey, we have let the words of St. Francis of Assisi remind us of our connection to the web of life. We have also praised God through creation’s gift of wonder and beauty. And now we come to Easter morning only to discover that our journey with God’s creation leads us...where else but a garden. We come to the garden and discover a place where the dew is still on the roses. We come to the garden and discover a place of beauty and quiet rest. We come to the garden and discover a place where we can feel the presence of God surrounding us. As dawn is breaking, we find ourselves in a garden, alone, wondering and waiting while a voice whispers in our ear, quietly disclosing the good news of Easter morning. This voice tells us that love has overcome hate, that in spite of what the world tries to tell us we must always remember that we are God’s own, made in the image of God. To the garden we come and discover new life for all of God’s creation as we listen to the voice of our Lord and Savior remind us that we are loved more than we could ever imagine.

You may have realized that there is always a method to my madness. We purposely chose the hymn, “In the Garden” as our prayer hymn this morning

because a) it fits with our Creation Theme and b) well, it is really is an Easter morning song.

Unfortunately, for a lot of us, we have a love/hate relationship with this particular song. We've heard it played one too many times in our churches like it is a funeral dirge...you know where we sit and hold the... "And....he walks. You have to do the head movement as you sing this song just in case you didn't know. It is a requirement. It is a tradition that goes back to the first time this hymn was ever played in a church. Sister Fran was on the organ that day and her C key got stuck...so First congregational church just had to sit there holding the note until she jimmied it lose. That's why there is a refrain on this note. It is there in honor of Sister Fran.

Okay, not really. I'm just kidding about that part but in all honesty, we have heard this song played on too many occasions that involved sadness and hopelessness that let's face it...on some level we all dread singing it in church. Even those who love it always worry and wonder about that whole "and he" part. Everyone has a moment of panic at that part, because we are not sure who is responsible for moving the song along, and we are worried that we are going to be stuck on the ANNNNN forever.

Well, since we are talking about the Resurrection this morning and reveling in the experience and joy of new life, I thought it only appropriate that we allow a little new life for this old, old hymn.

Just to give you a little background on the hymn, “In the Garden”, it was never meant to be a funeral dirge. Actually, this thought, this feeling of sadness and hopelessness whenever we hear this song, goes against what the composer, Austin Miles was feeling and experiencing when he wrote this hymn. He wrote it to be an opportunity for all of us as people of faith to be a part of the scene that first Easter morning, calling us to be silent witnesses to this wondrous moment of faith who would then go out and tell everyone that the darkness has not overcome the Light. This hymn is meant to celebrate and embody the Gospel moment of Easter.

"One day in March, 1912, while in his dark room waiting for film to develop, Miles had a profound spiritual experience in which he saw an incredible vision of Mary Magdalene visiting the empty tomb. He saw her leave the tomb and walk into a garden where she met the Master and heard Him speak her name."

He went on to share that "as I read (John's account of the resurrection) later that day, I seemed to be a part of the scene. I became a silent witness to the dramatic moment in Mary's life when she knelt down before her Lord and cried, "Rabboni!"

This song, "In the Garden" was never supposed to be a funeral dirge. It is a testimony to how one's life is transformed by the love and gift of new life found in the Risen Christ. This hymn is about turning our mourning into dancing. It is about turning our sorrow into celebration. It is about our voices of woe becoming joy like none other has ever known.

Imagine it: On that first Easter morning, when the dawn light is breaking, there is Mary Magdalene, weeping, tears streaming down her face and suddenly she hears her name being called. She turns to see the impossible made possible. She sees the Risen Lord face to face. The one who knows her and loves her, the one who has claimed her as a beloved child of God, the one she thought was dead is alive and standing right there beside her. How can her heart not leap for joy in celebration!

Love has overcome Hate. Light has overtaken the Darkness. Death has been transformed into Life. This truly is a joy like none other has ever none!

In the garden, on that first Easter morning, the established rules were changed. What we were told was impossible is made possible. What we are told would never happened...happened. In the garden on that first Easter morning, the established rules of what can happen, rules of how things are supposed to happen are overthrown. It was a brand new day. It is a brand new day! In this wondrous

moment of faith, our hearts are filled with joy, joy like none other has ever known!

In the garden, our lives, our world were and continue to be re-created. The Kingdom of God that greets us in the Risen Christ transforms everything and makes us whole. Through our voice of woe, he bids us go, go, rejoicing that the darkness has not and will not overcome the Word made Flesh, to go and celebrate that the Resurrection experience is nothing short of a re-creation of everything we thought we knew. To go and share with the world the melody that he gave to us that makes our hearts ring with joy and gladness!

You see, that's the power of the song. That's the power of the story, the Easter Story. Every time we sing it, Every time we read it, Every time we share it, we are reminded, the world is reminded, all of creation is reminded that the Risen Christ has made the impossible possible. We have become transformed into the people God created us to be-a people of new life, a people of new hope, a people who know that death and darkness do not have the last word.

In the garden, in the moments when we encounter the Risen Christ, in the places that we come upon that make our hearts sing and our joy complete, we realize that in these moments, seeds of hope are planted. They are planted in the rich soil of God's love and grace. And just when we least expect it...something

truly amazing happens. Somehow, some way, it may not be today, somehow, someday, these tiny seeds of hope take root and begin to grow.

We may not know exactly how long it will take, we may not know what the outcome will be, you know like how you plant carrot seeds in your vegetable garden and get cucumbers instead, certainly not what we expected but still they are signs of God's unfailing abundance and grace.

Somehow, some way, God sparks these tiny seeds of hope, rooted in the deep rich soil of God's love and grace, God sparks these tiny seeds of hope into new life and soon, soon new beginnings dot the landscape for all of God's creation, for all of God's people. Soon, soon, new signs of healing and wholeness fill our world. Soon, soon, these tiny seeds of hope become massive trees of life, in whose shade all are invited to come and find rest, to come and find renewal. Soon, soon, these tiny seeds of hope spring forth into trees of life, in whose very leaves will bring healing and wholeness for all the nations.

You see, the transforming power for Mary is in her encounter in the garden with our Lord and Savior. That is what's at the heart of Mary's story. That's what at the heart of our story as people of faith as well. Mary's story, our story, all of creation's story is not about rules and regulations. It is about the life giving, life changing, life renewing power that we have all experienced as we have

encountered the Risen Christ in our lives. It is Mary's encounter, it is our continued encounters with the Risen Christ that brings us joy- joy like none other has ever known. It is our meeting of the Risen Christ day in and day out that reminds us to go and show the world that love will always have the last word.

There is an old Mexican proverb that says "They tried to bury us but they didn't know we were seeds." Today, seeds of hope, seeds of new life, seeds of love and grace have been planted in our heart and in our world. They have been planted in the garden for you, for me, and for all of God's creation. May they grow. May they blossom. May they flourish so that all the world can experience our joy, a joy like none other has ever know. Amen.