

How many of you are gardeners? Or at least, how many of you have been looking at the ground lately and thinking, it is almost time.

After all, the light is changing. The days stretch a little more each day. The air feels different when we step outside in the morning. Something in us stirs along with it. Even if the soil is still a bit cold, there is that feeling. I want to get my hands in the dirt.

If you have ever gardened, you know this about yourself. You are always working with what appears to be nothing. I mean, small, dry, unimpressive seeds. Soil that has been frozen and hardened. Last year's growth, broken down and seemingly lifeless. Still, we long to kneel down, to dig in, to plant.

Because somewhere deep in our bones, we know something that is hard to explain but impossible to shake: life can come from this.

When we turn to the Gospel this morning, we find ourselves in a different garden—one where, unlike before, no one is thinking about planting.

John tells us it was still dark.

Mary Magdalene is not there with seeds, hope, or expectation. This day, she brings grief. The kind that settles into your body. The kind that makes everything feel heavy and slightly unreal at the same time. She is there because someone she loves has died. Everything she thought might be growing, and everything Jesus had been talking about, seems to have come to an end.

For Mary, this is not a garden of possibility. Instead, it feels like a place of loss.

The tomb comes into view—a shadow in the morning mist. The stone is rolled away. Her first thought is not hope, but yet another loss. *"They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid him."*

She runs. She tells the others. They come. They look. And they leave. That is all.

But Mary,.....Mary stays.

She stays in the garden. And she weeps.

I wonder if part of what opens her heart to what comes next is simply this. She does not leave that place of sorrow and grief. She remains.

Something startles her..... A sound? A shadow? And she turns and sees Jesus standing there, but she does not recognize him. She supposes him to be the gardener.

And I love that detail so much. Because she is not entirely wrong.

Wendell Berry, poet farmer, who knows a thing or two about soil and seasons, once wrote, *"The soil is the great connector of lives, the source and destination of all."*

And that feels right, doesn't it?

All of this happens, right in the ground—a place that looks like an ending, where things are buried, break down, and return to the earth. Somehow, mysteriously, that very place, which feels so barren, becomes the source of new life.

A gardener believes in life they cannot see. A gardener kneels in soil that looks lifeless. Trusting, they know something is happening beneath the surface. The seeds buried there are not gone—what looks like an ending is not the end.

So, let's look around us today. We are standing right now in the middle of new life. *It is spring!*

The lilies are already poking up through the soil in my garden. Not much. Just small green tips. Easy to miss if you are not looking closely. But they are there.

I know many of you see signs of life in your gardens. Maybe there are crocuses in your yard. Those bright, stubborn little blooms—purple and yellow—show up with color and confidence, even when the air still has a chill.

Have you noticed the trees? They are not fully green yet, but they are not bare either. There is a softness to them now. A slight fuzziness at the edges hints that life is returning.

We are surrounded by it. Signs of life. Signs that what looked dead was not dead. Signs that something has been happening beneath the surface all along.

Even with these signs around us, it is easy to forget their significance in our own lives.

When something in our lives feels buried—a relationship, a hope, a foundation we counted on crumbles—we do not usually say, this is probably where new life is about to begin.

Mary stands, both literally and emotionally, in that place—a place that feels like an ending, where everything she loved has been taken from her.

This scene of Mary and “the Gardner” makes me think of that old hymn...*“I come to the garden alone... and the voice I hear, falling on my ear...”*

He simply says her name.

“Mary.”

And here is the moment. Not when everything is explained. Not when everything is fixed. But when she hears her name.

And in that moment, everything turns. Not because her grief disappears. Not because everything suddenly makes sense. But because, in the garden, *she realizes she is not alone.*

Perhaps that is what resurrection really looks like: not everything is suddenly fixed, not everything bursts into full bloom, but there is the steady presence of the gardener—right there in the soil of our lives, right in the places that still feel unfinished.

Because gardens take time. They are slow. They are full of long stretches where it looks like nothing is happening at all.

Until one day,..... a small green shoot appears..... And then another.....And thensomething begins to grow.

Which means this: resurrection does not undo loss. But it does mean that loss is not the end of the story. Because something is still growing. Even now.

And then, before Mary has time to fully take it all in, Jesus sends her out with a message.

“Go and tell.” Go, Mary, and tell.

He sends her while she still holds grief in one hand, and wonder in the other.

And she goes. And she tells, ***“I have seen the Lord.”***

“I have seen the Lord.”

This leads to a big question: what does resurrection hold for us in this time and these days we live in?

Well, maybe Easter joy means noticing that life is already stirring.

And with those signs of life comes a promise: God is not finished. Life is more stubborn than we think. Hope has deeper roots than we imagined. Even when the darkness feels scary, and the ground feels cold, something is already pushing toward the light.

It holds the possibility that even in places that feel like endings, something new is beginning. Not instead of what has been lost, but somehow, mysteriously, through it, in spite of it.

And it holds the invitation to trust that we are not alone in the garden.

That we are known. That we are called by name. And that we are part of the garden God is growing.

Maybe this is what it means to *“practice resurrection”*, as Berry writes in his poem, *Manifesto: The Mad Farmer Liberation Front*.¹ *Practicing resurrection* is to trust that even in the soil of our lives, even in what feels buried or broken or finished, God is at work.

Bringing life out of death. Growing something new.

And it holds possibility.

Because if this Gospel is true, then even here, even now, something is stirring. The story is not finished.

Something is growing. And right here, right where we least expect it, new life is breaking through.

“So, friends, every day do something

That won't compute. Love the Lord.

Love the world. Work for nothing.

Take all that you have and be poor.

*Love someone who does not deserve it..... Practice resurrection.”*²

Alleluia, Christ is risen.

The Lord is risen indeed. Alleluia.

¹ Wendell Berry. *Manifesto: The Mad Farmer Liberation Front*. From *The Country of Marriage*. Harcourt Brace. 1973.

² *Ibid.*