

“Not the Gardener?” Mary at the Tomb - reimagined from John 20
Wildwood Mennonite Church // Easter Sunday 2019

I thought he was the gardener.

There I was, mourning Jesus’ death, visiting his tomb, carrying the basket full of incense that I had prepared to anoint his body. Jesus was literally the only thing on my mind that day.



And when he was there, right in front of me, face to face, I failed to see him. The only thing I wanted, and I confused him for someone else. Perhaps in that moment it was all just too good to be true?

I thought he was the gardener.

Kind of a strange detail for your scribes to record, hey? A bit embarrassing for me, and not at all relevant to the story--Jesus is alive! Who cares if I thought he was the butcher, the baker, or the candlestick maker!

But it does matter. I thought he was the gardener, because we were in a garden.

John wrote that part down because he didn’t want people to miss that detail.

Jesus’ body was not buried in a common grave in a traditional field cemetery. And even though some of his wealthy friends offered, we didn’t put his body in one of their fancy family crypts carved into the side of a cliff.

No, we buried Jesus in a garden, close to his cross.

Like, a full-fledged garden. Not like a nicely manicured plot in Woodlawn or Hillcrest, an actual garden. Flowers, trees, birds, critters, nice little streams, the whole thing. Wild and free. Full of beauty. Full of *life*.

Even though there was a tomb in the middle of it, the garden was full of life.

Can you see that?



Maybe you've forgotten, but my people did not. We knew that the garden was where it all began, back *In The Beginning*. The Garden of Delight, "Eden", we called it: Flowers, trees, birds, critters, nice little streams, the whole thing. Wild and free, full of beauty, full of life.

That Garden was lost to us. We had been cast out, cut off because of our selfishness, our sin. We felt that divide, carried it in our bodies. Clean vs Unclean, Sacred vs Pagan, Life vs Death.

We wanted to go back, that Garden was where we belonged: peace, justice, harmony, *shalom*.

But we could never go back. To be human was to be fallen, unholy, separated from God, outside the Garden.

Death was decay, corruption, blight. The Tomb was the opposite of the Garden.

But not in this one. Not today. Not with Jesus.

This Garden has a tomb right in the middle of it. And yet it goes on being a Garden!

Do you see it?

John wrote it down in his gospel story: "*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.*"

The place of life was right in the middle of the place of death, and this Garden has a Tomb right in the middle of it!

Death did not put Jesus outside the Garden.

What if life and death are not separate, but two pieces of the whole? Could it be that death is not banishment, not corruption, not the end of anything?

Death has a place in the Garden! Maybe it's been there the whole time?

Jesus tried to tell us this a few days before: "*Very truly, I tell you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit.*" John wrote that one down, too.

That's what it was like to follow Jesus, his life was all about holding those impossible things together:

loss *and* growth
justice *and* mercy
saints *and* sinners
friends *and* enemies
hope *and* fear
love *and* pain
and now, life *and* death.

It's all there, in the Garden. Is it still Paradise, Eden, the Garden of Delight, if joy and sorrow both persist? Can we carry both life and death and still name this garden Good?

Wild and free, full of beauty, full of life. Even with a tomb in the middle.

I thought he was the gardener.

You tell me--was I wrong?

