

Easter Sunday 2023 YA

Life in the Garden  
By the Rev. Salying Wong

*[Remove chasuble and recline on bench with linen cloth on face. Lie on the bench for long silence. Tomb opening sound plays over speakers. Sit up suddenly and quickly, gasping for breath. Turn to congregation and Feel wrists and moan with pain. Feel feet and moan with pain.]*

Shall I stand? Would you stand? Anastasis. Risen! Oh, look, the Angel Gabriel left me some bandaids. They always think of the little things.

Where am I? I'm in a garden! Of course I am. Just like the beginning. What do I mean? You see, when God first made people, God worked in a garden. God took some dirt and shaped it into a person. God blew breath into the clay and it quickened. Then there was a human.

Before I died, I talked a lot about being born from above. Nicodemus misunderstood me. He thought I meant "born again", like crawling back into his mother's womb. That's not what I was talking about. I meant something more like this—like what God did in Eden when he made Adam and Eve. The clay was dead and then it was alive. I was dead and now I'm alive. I entered that tomb—that womb—and now I'm born anew; born from above. I am re-created. That's what resurrection life is. It is not resuscitation. It is re-creation. It is another kind of life, a life that emerges because of God's fidelity to us—and this time, there is no doubt that God is faithful. That is what death taught me—God is faithful even when we are dead.

In the old life there was distance from God. Mind you this was just a perception, just a point of view. I noticed, before I died, how people were convinced that there was distance between them and God. Real or not, it

was real in their minds. This conviction of distance created all kinds of suffering: the inability to forgive, the blaming, the anger and hatred. Even murder. Even betrayal. Consider Judas Iscariot, whom I loved. He was so angry with me for not being the kind of messiah he wanted me to be. Judas, like most people, had a script for life that he demanded it be acted out as he wrote it. I disappointed him so much—he felt betrayed by me. It was so easy then for him to “return the favor”. He thought that if he didn’t have life turn out the way he wanted, then God was not the kind of God he wanted.

God is the author of resurrection life and the script is not a prescription or blueprint. What God authoring is more like a poem. Judas had a hard turn, but he certainly isn’t alone in his perception of the world through a script of his own devising. This is why I came to preach repentance. Repentance is about dropping a point of view that does not lead to life; it is about taking on a new perspective—a point of view from within God, abiding within God, so that there we recognize that there is no distance at all between us and God.

While I was dead, I talked with him, Judas. I told him I forgave him. He’s a tough nut to crack. He said he’d think about it. Accepting forgiveness, forgiving yourself, means accepting that you are in great need, in need of something you cannot generate yourself—grace. Unmerited. But, I think he’ll come around. He has all the time in the world.

*[A sound—listens]*

Ooh, I hear somebody in the garden. I wonder who it is? Oh, it’s my beloved disciple, Mary Magdalene. I bet she won’t recognize me, now that I’m a new creation.

“Woman, why are you weeping? Me, the gardener?”

Well, that’s actually sort of true. As my said before, after God made the heavens and the earth, God then went to a garden and shaped clay into a

man and blew breath in him to make him alive. I did some like this with the man born blind. I took clay and I spit it in and I reshaped his eyes. And when that happened, he became a new creation. It was a sign of the new creation I would make of all my sheep. This man was my sheep. I have many sheep.

Speaking of sheep, I told people before I was dead, that I am the Good Shepherd and I call my sheep by name. It looks like Mary doesn't recognize me because of my resurrection body. Because she is one of my sheep, I bet she'll recognize me when I call her by name. Watch this:

(begin with hum and then sing) "Oh Mary, don't you weep no more. Oh Mary don't you weep no more. Pharaoh's army got drowned. Oh, Mary, don't you weep. Mary! Yeah, bring it in. Yeah, it's okay, let it all out. Your Rabonnie is here."

[Facing congregation] "Yup, Rabboni. That's me. She loves calling me that. Her little beloved rabbi. She is my little beloved sheep."

"Whoa Mary! Yes, I like the hugs. But, this is getting a bit desperate. Don't cling to me. This isn't my full glory. This [showing body] isn't the ultimate. I must ascend. I must go to my father and your father. When this happens, you will have me always. Do not cling to this form. It won't last. Resurrection life is not this kind of script. It isn't more of the same."

[turn to congregation] You see, I know life can be so confusing. It is hard to live a life of abundance because some pain is so hard to bear. I understand. I died the worst possible death anyone could die and was betrayed in the most excruciating way to hold out hope for you that there's life after that. God is there in the pit and God will show you the path of life. I must warn you, though, resurrection life is actually harder than the old life. A life based in grace takes immense courage. Have you ever fallen and fallen and fallen so hard, you just wanted to stay on the ground. It takes courage to stand up and to take the aching steps away from the rubble—and to aim your face toward the future, but without the old script.

I now must go to the disciples, as they are quaking with fear. They are really discouraged because they all betrayed me by running away. I must go declare to them my peace. They will need that for the next chapter, when even more will be demanded of them than they could have imagined. But, this time, they will be brave and they will do greater things than I.

[Turn to Mary.] Mary, go to my brothers and tell them you've seen me. I send you as an apostle to the apostles. Those guys might believe you because you're a woman, but we'll show them when I walk through the locked door. It'll be our inside joke. Go, now Mary, my beloved disciple.

She's the best!