

"Come to the Garden"  
An Easter Sunday Reflection  
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Shoreline Unitarian Universalist Society  
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Opening Words      *Mark 16: 1-8*

16 When the sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices, so that they might go and anoint him. <sup>2</sup> And very early on the first day of the week, when the sun had risen, they went to the tomb. <sup>3</sup> They had been saying to one another, "Who will roll away the stone for us from the entrance to the tomb?" <sup>4</sup> When they looked up, they saw that the stone, which was very large, had already been rolled back. <sup>5</sup> As they entered the tomb, they saw a young man, dressed in a white robe, sitting on the right side; and they were alarmed. <sup>6</sup> But he said to them, "Do not be alarmed; you are looking for Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has been raised; he is not here. Look, there is the place they laid him. <sup>7</sup> But go, tell his disciples and Peter that he is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him, just as he told you." <sup>8</sup> So they went out and fled from the tomb, for terror and amazement had seized them; and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid.

Reading      *"Rebirth" by Rev. Elizabeth Tarbox*

When the day is too bright, or the night too dark,  
and your feelings are like an avalanche  
barreling down the mountain of events  
outside your control,  
when you look down and you are falling  
and you cannot see the bottom,  
or when your pain has eaten you  
and you are nothing  
but an empty hungry hole,  
then there is an opportunity for giving.

Don't stay home and cover your head with a pillow.  
Go outside and plant a tulip bulb in the ground:  
that is an act of rebirth.  
Sprinkle breadcrumbs for the squirrels  
or sunflower seed for the birds:  
that is a claiming of life.  
And when you have done that,  
or if you cannot do that,  
go stare at a tree whose leaves  
are letting go for its very survival.  
Pick up a leaf, stare at it;  
it is life, it has something to teach you.

You are as precious as the birds

or the tulips or the tree whose crenulated bark  
protects the insects who seek its shelter.  
You are an amazing, complex being,  
with poetry in your arteries,  
and charity layered beneath your skin.  
You have before you a day full  
of opportunities for living and giving.  
Do not think you know all there is to know about yourself,  
for you have not given enough away yet  
to be able to claim self-knowledge.  
Do you have work to do today?  
Then do it as if your life were  
hanging in the balance,  
do it as fiercely as if it mattered, for it does.  
Do you think the world doesn't need you?  
Think again!  
You cleanse the world with your breathing,  
you beautify the world with your giving,  
you perfect the world with your thinking and acting and caring.

Don't stay home and suffocate on your sorrow:  
go outside and give yourself to the world's asking.

Reading      *Excerpt from "The Secret Garden" by Frances Hodgson Burnett*

*A reading from Frances Burnet's story of three children: Mary, a sour-faced orphan, Dickon, the boy who shows her the magic of tending a garden and loving the world, and Colin, whose mother died in an accident in the garden, a boy who has been shut away like the garden, told he is going to die, and after ten years of a life of pain and fear, spring blooms in the Secret Garden, and Colin comes back to life.*

"When Mary found this garden it was quite dead...Then something began pushing things up out of the soil and making things out of nothing. One day things weren't there and another they were. I had never watched things before and it made me feel very curious...I keep saying to myself, 'What is it?' 'What is it?' It's something. It can't be nothing! I don't know its name so I call it Magic. I have never seen the sun rise, but Mary and Dickon have and from what they tell me, I am sure that is Magic too. Something pushes it up and draws it. Sometimes since I've been in the garden, I've looked up through the trees at the sky and I have had a strange feeling of being happy —as if something were pushing and drawing in my chest and making me breathe fast. Magic is always pushing and drawing and making things out of nothing.

...The Magic in this garden has made me stand up and know I am going to live to be a man. I am going to make the scientific experiment of trying to get some and put it in myself and make it push and draw me and make me strong. I don't know how to do it, but I think that if you keep thinking about it and calling it perhaps it will come."

## Reflections *Come to the Garden*

What a blessing this morning is. Long awaited, Easter is finally, finally here. The earth has woken up. Our hearts are once again invited to life's bounty. And isn't it about time?! We turn our faces toward the sun and we give thanks.

Even as recently as about a month ago, I began to wonder if today would ever come. I was tiding myself over on the long journey toward spring by reminding myself about the bulbs I knew were doing their work in the earth. Picturing their roots growing millimeter by millimeter down, down into the rich earth, alive under its cracked, cold shell. I was ravenous for those first green shoots. When they finally emerged, I gobbled them up with my eyes. Touching their tender leaves, I feasted on them with my fingers.

One of my favorite scenes in the 1993 movie adaptation of Frances Burnett's *The Secret Garden* is a time lapse photography sequence of bulbs: the tendrils of their roots working into the earth, the hard bulb cracking, shoots emerging, petals unfolding slowly, slowly. I think of these images each spring. Each year as the sun grows stronger, I think of Mary and Dickon on the moor and sickly Colin coming to life again in his mother's hidden garden.

Now perhaps you've never read *The Secret Garden*. Or perhaps it's been a while. I reread it not long ago, and it was like snuggling into my childhood. There were a few things I'd missed as a child: for one thing, some intense racial slurs gave me pause this time around. The story was originally published in 1910. And Burnett was not immune to the assumptions of racial superiority inherent in British Imperialism. That said, I was also struck by Burnett's hard-hitting and arguably progressive commentary on the English class system, by how apropos it is as a celebration of spring and by how much it has to teach us about resurrection.

Mary, is an English girl born in India and raised by parents who were not so interested in having a little girl. After her parents die of cholera, Mary is sent to the Yorkshire countryside to live at her uncle's estate despite the fact that he is perpetually abroad. Sadness, mystery, and fear pervade the huge manor house.

She learns that her aunt had died in her garden ten years earlier and that her husband, broken hearted, locked the door to the garden, buried the key, and fled for foreign lands.

Their son Colin had also been locked away; everyone expected he would die. He did not, but kept in bed his whole life, he cannot use his legs and he often cries hysterically because he is so afraid he *will* die. Until his cousin Mary hears him one night, and they become friends. Finally, when she feels she can trust him, she tells him that she has discovered the secret garden.

Mary and her cousin Colin, have every material good in the world and servants at their beck and call, yet they are sorely neglected, deprived of the love of their parents. They are ill and scraggly, disagreeable and repelling.

Until the magic of the garden works on their hearts and their bodies. They work in the garden with a Yorkshire boy, Dickon, who is accompanied everywhere by animals and coaxes living things from every piece of ground he touches. They begin to grow stronger.

This year, as we waited desperately for signs of life in our own “FROZEN” landscape, I thought of Dickon explaining to Mary (who is quite pessimistic at first) that the abandoned garden they have discovered is not dead. He breaks a grey branch and shows her how the life inside of it is just waiting to burst forth. He says it is *wick* – *ALIVE*. With tender care, he says, it will flourish.

This morning, I read the Easter story from the earliest written story we have about Jesus of Nazareth, the Gospel of Mark. I like this version because even though the modern biblical text goes on for a few more verses, scholars think the original text stopped right where I stopped reading: The women “went out and fled from the [empty] tomb, for terror and amazement had seized them; and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid.”

There is no ascension, no resurrection, no reappearances by the man they called Rabbi, the man they loved so well. There is simply the empty tomb and the message: *the one you are looking for is not here*.

Now, some of us prefer to steer clear of the Christian Easter story at Easter time. We may feel that if we don’t believe in the bodily resurrection, then this story isn’t for us. We can stick to bunnies and eggs – symbols of the pagan roots of the holiday we celebrate today.

But if we do, then we miss the profundity of the empty tomb. And we miss the power of a story of human pain, and human grief, of human resilience, and the truth that many of us have learned the hard way: despair is never the end of the story, and love is stronger than death.

This year, I have been re-imagining that first Easter morning. The women went to the tomb to prepare Jesus’s body, and perhaps they did. And perhaps those words echoed in their mind. *“The one you are looking for is not here.”* Because the Jesus they knew and loved was not there in the tomb. In effect, the tomb was empty.

Other versions of the Easter story tell us that Jesus soon began to appear to his friends: in the faces of the cemetery gardener, a stranger on the road, a man eating fish, who offers them a meal. “Do not be afraid,” they hear him say. “Do not be afraid.”

What they thought was the end of the story, in tragedy, in death, was not. There was despair and loss and pain, but there was also hope and love and joy. They continued their work in the world, healing people, telling the story of their teacher, spreading his message of love and justice. Love was, in fact, stronger than death.

“When Mary found this garden it was quite dead” Colin says “...Then something began pushing things up out of the soil and making things out of nothing.”

Colin too was quite dead, sad and afraid, carrying the weight of his mother’s death, his father’s despair. And then, in the paradise of his Mother’s garden, something “pushes and draws” in his chest, something makes him breathe fast, a strange, unfamiliar feeling comes over him: happiness, excitement, curiosity.

He stands on his two feet and learns to walk again. He knows he will live. This is the same Magic at work, he says as pulls the sun up each day, the same Magic that unfurls buds and makes dry branches come to life.

Have you ever felt dead, closed up by despair, the key to your soul garden buried and abandoned? I know I have. What has brought you to life again?

Easter reminds us that resurrection is possible. That this “Magic” is available to all of us, that it is a Magic we can “call” and “get” and put inside ourselves and grow strong.

At Easter, we renew our sense of wonder. We marvel at the stone rolled away, at the green shoots that emerge from cold packed soil, at the branches wick underneath dry bark.

“When your pain has eaten you and you are nothing but an empty hungry hole, Go outside,” the poet tells us. “Plant a tulip bulb. That is an act of rebirth,” an opportunity for giving to the world. It is also an act of faith.

This Spring, even if we feel stuck in the empty tomb, even if we can only hold a single leaf, that leaf has something to teach us: We are a part of the Magic and it is working.

The leaf, the bulb, the shoots remind us that the creative spirit that emerges from deep within the earth lives in within us. The act of planting, of preparing, of giving to the world is fueled by the creative power that keeps us moving in the midst of despair—that something that some of us have no word for other than God.

We are reminded once again that love and hope are stronger than death; we find the strength to not suffocate on sorrow, but to give ourselves to the world’s asking.

What is emerging in you this spring? What will you give to the world? What green shoots (ideas, dreams, loves) lie waiting in the garden of your soul? Maybe it was locked away, maybe overgrown, maybe just forgotten in the hubbub of life, but it is there and it is wick. The garden of your soul is calling you.

This Easter, we are all and each invited to take part in the Magic, to roll away the stone, to come to the garden – to do the work of loving and living and remembering that death is never the end of the story.

So if you are ready to grab a trowel and dig into the earth, if you are ready to fill it with seeds and create something where there was nothing, then Come to The Garden!

If you are weary and weak and looking to come alive again, Come to The Garden!

If despair has frozen your heart and you fear the stone will never be rolled away, then take heart, and Come to the Garden.

If you are ready to give to the world, to offer a helping hand and an open heart, Come to The Garden!

If you are curious, excited, coming alive. If you are ready for Magic, then COME TO THE GARDEN!

Happy Easter!

Happy Spring!

Blessed Be.

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