

Rev. Cameron Barr

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Among my favorite things about United Church is this garden. Believe it or not, some people have expressed to me grumpy opinions about the garden. They don't like how it looks in the winter. Or they think we should cut down the dormant grasses and empty seed heads sooner. So I do my best to explain that this is meant to be a native ecosystem, a garden that expresses our values for environmental justice, and a landscape that celebrates the diversity of God's creation. Although it is a beautiful garden, it's not just beauty that we're going for here. We cultivate this garden as a living animation of God's covenant with us. From the emerging bulbs and bright flowers of spring to the fullness of the summer season - and, yes, to the fall when the leafy greens fall to the earth and winter when birds finish off the berries exposed to the cold air - the garden is not just for beauty, but for life.

In the past year many of us have spent more time in this garden than ever before. When we cannot gather inside, we would come to the garden. This year has darkened the building behind us, but it has brought more life to the garden. At least two weddings have occurred here on the lawn. Several memorial services. I've seen committee meetings in the garden. Sometimes I will stumble across church members who have come here to the garden for a picnic lunch. I've even met a therapist who made our garden into their consultation room when it was not possible to sit indoors.

So we have come here to the garden as if to sit by the tomb of Jesus. Perhaps when we have come here, we came to remember, to grieve. When we have come here, we came because it was a place we could be safe when other places were threatening or a place that we could socialize when other places were lonely. We must think of this garden in light of John's gospel. We must think of ourselves in light of Mary's faithfulness. For this bright garden and this dark building look very much like the garden in which Mary sat outside the tomb of Jesus.

The biblical account of God's creative love begins in the garden. And according to John's gospel, in the very end - beyond the end, after the crucifixion - Mary goes to sit by Jesus in the very place where the biblical story began. I have been reading the memoir recently of the Irish poet Padraig O Tuama, who makes the point that Mary's encounter with Jesus in the garden is not an accident. The gospel of John rhymes with the book of Genesis. If in the book of Genesis our first experience of creation was in the garden, then it should hardly surprise us that Christ's resurrection is joyfully revealed to us in the same setting.

And here we are again today - the stone is rolled away! God's creative love is disclosed to us again. Christ is raised to new life in victory and in power. Carry the memory of Easter morning and treasure the mystery of resurrection.

In all that we have lived through, have you not experienced the grace? In all the darkness of recent months, you need to hear this Good News! Do not be deceived by despair. Do not be corrupted by the cynicism. God's love has been revealed right here among us. And Mary has spoken to him in this very place.

Christ is Risen! Christ is Risen indeed!