

We've been reading through the Gospel of John since Christmas and starts with a story of creation, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was God. Everything came into being through God." And a few verses later is John's story of Jesus' birth, "the Word (Jesus) became flesh and dwelt among us... full of grace and truth."

Jumping forward again some 30 years brings us to today's reading. It is the morning of the first Easter and the early action revolves around a tomb. Mary Magdalene is the first on the scene and, finding the grave empty, runs to tell Peter and the Beloved Disciple. They race to the scene. Peter, runs slower but enters the tomb first and leaves confused. The Beloved Disciple enters, sees and believes—but doesn't say anything. They go and Mary is left to grieve alone. Yet she is not alone, she turns and sees, but does not recognize, Jesus, and presumes he is a gardener. He asks her, "Woman, why are you weeping?" After asking Jesus if he knows where her Lord has been taken, Jesus calls her by name, "Mary," and her eyes are opened as she recognizes her beloved Lord and Teacher.

This scene of new life, truth and unexpected grace upon grace, is like the opening verses of the Gospel John filled with imagery from Genesis. "In the beginning," John writes in chapter 1, announcing his intent to tell a new creation story and John brings the story full circle, as Jesus addresses Mary as "Woman" reminding us of Eve in the Garden of Eden. Eve literally means "life" so as Jesus calls her "woman," we are all drawn into the story and the sin that started in the garden. The confusion and wonderment of the first Easter finds Mary in a garden and she is about to experience the death that was set in motion in that first garden overturned, by the One who is the gardener.

Mary sees the truth, the unexpected grace upon grace when she is invited into relationship. When Jesus calls her by name, her eyes are opened and she recognizes that it is Jesus. She fully sees, she announced to the disciples, "I have seen the Lord." Not just that Jesus is alive, but once invited into relationship Mary proclaims that Jesus is Lord.

We seek to be recognized – noticed, friended, retweeted—but even more we seek to be known, like when Jesus calls Mary by name. So often we are recognized by our differences, and there are times when differences matter especially if you are part of a group that hasn't been recognized. If your opportunities have been limited in the workplace because of your gender or race, then it makes total sense to ask, even demand, that those differences be recognized and affirmed.

Injustice is rooted in the scarcity and anxiety that radiate from the Garden of Eden. But, it is Easter morning and Mary is in the garden with the Gardener, who is tending the hope of the resurrection. Jesus moves beyond recognizing "woman" to calling her by name, "Mary," inviting her into relationship. Easter promises that we can hope that we too are called by name. We are invited to be truly and fully known—to be seen and accepted—beloved disciples, children of our heavenly Father, sheep of Jesus' flock.

As we are known and accepted, we are freed to know and accept others as they are. This is the heart of the gospel, this is grace upon grace, this is the love that is Jesus' mission, this is the community that is Peace Lutheran, a place where all can be fully known and loved and sent back into the world equipped with that love, to love.

We are invited to garden with the Gardener. This week how will you tend God's garden? First, how will you daily, bask in the radiance of God's love and acceptance for you? Plants need the light. Will it be to take time to breathe or walk or say a prayer or meditate? You know the things that fill you, that make you your true-self, your best self. Take that into your week. Second, how will you radiate God's love? How will you be gardener, tending God's beloved garden? What is one tangible daily action you will commit to yourself to do this week that shares God's love with others?

For God so loved the world—you are a named part of God's garden. You matter to God. Jesus cares about you and desires the best for you. Jesus' love meets you in the garden, in the glory of creation and empowers you to be gardener—to be co-creator with God in bringing about love for all the world. Amen.