

Unexpected Gardeners

April 12, 2009

(Easter Day)

John 20:1-18

St. Alban's Episcopal Church, Waco, Texas

Alleluia! Christ is risen!
The Lord is risen indeed! Alleluia!

When I was very young, my extended family decided to take a ski vacation.

My parents, me, my aunt, my uncle and all my cousins planned to meet in New Mexico to snow ski.

On the first day of our trip, everyone met up at the hotel at the ski resort and had dinner together.

At dinner, the whole family began to make plans to begin skiing the next morning.

My Uncle Sterk was the ring leader of the group and everyone agreed to be up at 6 o'clock the next morning.

Before everyone went to bed that night at the hotel, Uncle Sterk told us that he would personally see to it that everyone was awake at 6 o'clock.

Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, the phone rang in our hotel room.

My mother answered the phone and heard:
"Good morning, it is 6 o'clock."

My mom responded:

'Oh my God, Sterk.

I am as sick as a dog.

It must have been something I ate at dinner,
Because I started feeling sick about midnight.

Then I was up at one and again at three.

Sterk, there is no way I can go skiing this morning,

Because ever since four o'clock, I have been running back and forth to the bathroom.

The voice on the other end of the phone said:

“Ma’am, this is the front desk at the hotel with your wake up call.”

Early on that morning, my mother received a wake up call, with an unexpected result.

And two thousand years ago, Mary Magdalene and Peter and John received a morning wake up call, also with an unexpected result.

Early on the first day of the week, while it is still dark, the phone rings at the house where the disciples are staying.

On the other end of the phone is Mary Magdalene, who is in hysterics. She tells Peter and John that Jesus’ body has been stolen.

And after a spirited foot race to the tomb, Peter and John see that the body of Jesus is not there.

But Mary stands crying outside the tomb.

Mary then turns around and sees a gardener.

The gardener says to Mary:

“Why are you crying?

Whom are you looking for?”

Mary asks him where the body of Jesus could be.

Then, Mary receives an unexpected wake up call as the gardener says her name:

“Mary.”

Mary then realizes that it is Jesus - as she exclaims “Rabbouni!”

So, Mary Magdalene runs and announces to the disciples:

“I have seen the Lord!”

Early in the morning, while it is still dark,

Our phone rings with unexpected news that the body of Jesus has been stolen.

We run to the tomb to find Jesus.

And then he says our name and he appears to us, time and time again,

As the unexpected, simple gardener - with a hoe and a rake in his hand.

As an ordained minister, I meet so many people who really want to see Jesus.

I encounter so many people who are looking for proof of the Resurrection.

I know so many people who stand outside the empty tomb crying and weeping, wondering why life can seem empty and meaningless.

And to all those people this morning who are looking for Jesus, wondering why his body has been stolen, I am here today to tell you that Jesus is alive!

However, this risen Jesus will most likely not appear to you in a flash of lightening or in an earthquake.

But instead, when we speak to the common and ordinary gardener, he will say your name and you will know that God is alive and is active in this world.

Last Friday, we had a Good Friday worship service at noon here at St. Alban's.

During that Good Friday service, we stood at the foot of the Cross and listened to how Jesus was buried in the tomb.

Then, we left the tomb and went out these doors.

And as I exited this church, one of our church members, Lynn Woodward, was on her hands and knees in the courtyard.

Lynn was digging in the dirt, planting new spring plants and doing her wonderful ministry of being our gardener - our gardener who works only out of the goodness of her own heart.

As we exited this church, Lynn was in overalls, with a handkerchief around her head, her elbows and her face covered in mud.

And I noticed that many people walked right past her, thinking that she was just the gardener.

But to those who spoke to Lynn, doing her silent ministry, they would have received an unexpected wake up call, and experienced that Jesus is really alive, today.

You see, it has been my experience that we don't usually meet the risen Jesus in a miraculous flash of light.

But, we meet Jesus in the unexpected.

We meet Jesus when we speak to the gardener.

On this Easter morning, I feel like I am the most blessed priest on earth.
Because I am surrounded by people, like you, who silently do your
ministry.

I am surrounded by people, like you, who constantly surprise me with
unexpected wake up calls.

I am surrounded by people who create Stations of the Cross,
who teach in our schools,
who give sacrificially,
who dig in the dirt,
who work in the world in an ethical manner,
who make beautiful music and
who invite people to this church.

I am surrounded by people, like you, who are unexpected gardeners.
And because of you, I can say with conviction:
“I have seen the Lord!”

Early in the morning, while it is still dark, the phone rings with an
unexpected phone call.

It is not the front desk, but it is Mary Magdalene, proclaiming:
“I have seen the Lord!”

My brothers and sisters, I have seen the risen Lord, as well.
I meet him each and every day that I open my eyes to the unexpected.
I meet him each and every day that I see you loving and forgiving and
serving each other.

For, the body of Jesus has not been stolen.
The body of Jesus is here - and he is alive - within these walls and inside
these doors.

And by the way, as you walk out of these doors,
Don't forget to speak - to the gardener.

AMEN.