

Come, Risen Christ, and help us tell your story!

Where does our sacred story begin? In a garden.

A lush garden, a jungle, a forest, watered by four rivers, teeming with life;
vegetation and animals, birds and insects; trees laden with fruit.

A place of plenty; a place of provision; a place of grace,

where the first woman and man walked with God in the cool of the evening.

That first man and woman were created to tend the garden.

Our first purpose was to be gardeners.

But before long those two broke their unity with God, and were expelled
from that garden and sent to thrive in a much harsher climate.

That part of the story is more familiar to most of us, where things often don't
come easily and relationships are often fraught and difficult, where we live
in a constant tension between what we want and what is good for others.

That is the landscape most of our sacred story traverses.

And yet woven through that story of hardship and enmity, struggle and loss,
we see the promises of God: the promise of reconciliation and forgiveness;
the promise of restoration and wholeness; the promise of renewal and plenty.

*Be glad and rejoice forever in what I am creating; no more shall the sound of
weeping be heard. No more shall there be in it an infant that lives but a
few days, or an old person who does not live out a lifetime;*

That's the vision sketched by the prophet Isaiah in the reading we just heard:

a world in which everyone has enough to eat and a safe home to live in;

in which we live in a relationship of mutual thriving with the creation around us;

in which even natural enemies become friends and collaborators.

And friends, that is not just a "there and later" promise.

It starts now, everything that reading was about – "they shall not hurt or destroy
on all my holy mountain" – it's already started.

That's what all our "Alleluias" are about this morning – God's new thing is here.

Hmmm. Really? Have you been alive in the last two years?

Have you seen the amount of pain and suffering the world has endured,

just in two years. Floods and famines and wars and pestilence,

over 500 million sick, many of them dead;

Have you watched the persistence of white supremacy, often violent;
the curtailing of the rights of gay and transgendered folk;
ever widening income disparity and economic inequity;
and online school, and mask wars, and the loss of so much is that is familiar...

Yes. The promise of Easter is that this vision is already here, as we are able to see it.
The new heavens and the new earth are already in place,
as we are able to walk in them. Jesus brought that reality into this world,
once and for all, and nothing can undo that.

Easter is not an event: Easter is a place we live in,
a reality we inhabit and make realer the more we dwell there.
We can choose to keep living in Good Friday, but Easter beckons.

There was a time in my life that felt like Good Friday – one week I learned that
my job was being cut and I would have to leave a church where I was thriving.
That next Sunday was Pentecost, and the bishop was visiting.

I was still in some shock that morning, but something happened at the 8 o'clock
service: I had been working pastorally situation with a young girl who'd
found herself unexpectedly pregnant, and had a radically different response
than her mother wanted her to have. They were quite estranged.

But that morning they both came the 8 o'clock service,
and I felt emboldened to invite them to join me in my office.

They began to hear each other and to make space for reconciliation.

I was so bowled over by the way the Holy Spirit had worked –

In bringing them both to the same service, in nudging me to suggest we talk
then and there; in opening their hearts to that possibility, and then to each other,
that I was just glowing as I came back up for the main service.

The bishop, who knew the uncertainty I was facing, saw me and said,

“How can you look so joyful?” It was so clear to me that God was on the move,
that the Spirit was all over the place that morning, there was no way to despair.

I could not be a Good Friday person in that Easter world.

Where are you being challenged to step into Easter, into the new story God is
writing? That Good Friday story of brutality and death and loss and sorrow
can have quite a hold on us... but we are invited to live in Easter.

Where does our Easter story begin?

In a garden, place of life amid death, a garden in which people are buried.

In that garden was a woman distraught with grief.
Two days earlier she'd watched a holy man die a brutal death;
a man she loved, a man who had set her free from unimaginable pain.
And now it seemed his body had been stolen – the body she was there to prepare
for burial, as there had been no time before the Sabbath began to do it Friday.
Not once but twice is she asked, “Why are you weeping?” “Why am I weeping?
Do you not realize everything that matters has been taken from me?”
Out of her Good Friday despair she cries,
“They have taken my Lord, and I don't know where they have laid him!”

That is the cry of every person who's ever experienced great loss and dislocation.
Where is that thing or person or job or identity we most relied on?
When we're in Good Friday it doesn't occur to us that God might do a new thing.
But God's new thing is already here.

I learned yesterday that a good translation of the name God gives when Moses
asks him his name is “I will be what I will be.” “I am becoming.” The very
nature of God is to bring about what is not yet – God is every possibility.
As Easter people, we borrow from that future that already is in the realm of God.
That's what we do when we pray for healing: we proclaim what already is in God.
And as we claim the future that will be, we bring it into the here and now.
We invite more people to turn from Good Friday and walk into Easter with us.

In that garden, Mary met the firstborn of the new humanity –
also sent to tend a garden, but now a garden of the spiritual life of
every person on the earth, to make real that promise Isaiah saw.
That promise came true Easter morning when Jesus' followers were
confronted by space where a dead body was supposed to be.
You know all those science fiction movies where an alien being has been captured
and scientists try to study or control it – and it gets out? That's our story!
Jesus has gotten out! He could no longer be constrained, confined to a
a given body in a given space and time. He is out – and friends, he is among us.
The more we walk into Easter and take up residence there, the more we see him.

*I am about to create new heavens and a new earth; says the Lord.
Be glad and rejoice forever in what I am creating.*

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

Isaiah 65:17-25

I am about to create new heavens and a new earth;
the former things shall not be remembered or come to mind.
But be glad and rejoice forever in what I am creating;
for I am about to create Jerusalem as a joy, and its people as a delight.
I will rejoice in Jerusalem, and delight in my people;
no more shall the sound of weeping be heard in it, or the cry of distress.
No more shall there be in it an infant that lives but a few days,
or an old person who does not live out a lifetime;
for one who dies at a hundred years will be considered a youth,
and one who falls short of a hundred will be considered accursed.
They shall build houses and inhabit them; they shall plant vineyards and eat their fruit.
They shall not build and another inhabit; they shall not plant and another eat;
for like the days of a tree shall the days of my people be,
and my chosen shall long enjoy the work of their hands.
They shall not labor in vain, or bear children for calamity;
for they shall be offspring blessed by the Lord-- and their descendants as well.
Before they call I will answer, while they are yet speaking I will hear.
The wolf and the lamb shall feed together, the lion shall eat straw like the ox;
but the serpent-- its food shall be dust!
They shall not hurt or destroy on all my holy mountain, says the Lord.

John 20:1-18

Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene came to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the tomb. So she ran and went to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one whom Jesus loved, and said to them, "They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid him."

Then Peter and the other disciple set out and went toward the tomb. The two were running together, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first.

He bent down to look in and saw the linen wrappings lying there, but he did not go in. Then Simon Peter came, following him, and went into the tomb. He saw the linen wrappings lying there, and the cloth that had been on Jesus' head, not lying with the linen wrappings but rolled up in a place by itself. Then the other disciple, who reached the tomb first, also went in, and he saw and believed; for as yet they did not understand the scripture, that he must rise from the dead. Then the disciples returned to their homes.

But Mary stood weeping outside the tomb. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb; and she saw two angels in white, sitting where the body of Jesus had been lying, one at the head and the other at the feet. They said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping?" She said to them, "They have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid him." When she had said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not know that it was Jesus. Jesus said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you looking for?" Supposing him to be the gardener, she said to him, "Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away." Jesus said to her, "Mary!" She turned and said to him in Hebrew, "Rabbouni!" (which means Teacher). Jesus said to her, "Do not hold on to me, because I have not yet ascended to the Father. But go to my brothers and say to them, 'I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.'" Mary Magdalene went and announced to the disciples, "I have seen the Lord"; and she told them that he had said these things to her.