

John 20:11-18

“Do/Did You Hear That?”

Rev. Lou Nyiri

April 25, 2021 (this sermon also preached at the 2021 Easter Sunrise)

**[Title Slide]**

This morning’s message is based upon John 20:11-18, let’s lean in & listen...to God’s word for us this day...

**[Scripture Slide – John 20:11-18]**

**Jesus Appears to Mary Magdalene**

<sup>11</sup> But Mary stood weeping outside the tomb. As she wept, she bent over to look<sup>[a]</sup> into the tomb; <sup>12</sup> 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. <sup>13</sup> 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.” <sup>14</sup> When she had said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not know that it was Jesus. <sup>15</sup> 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.” <sup>16</sup> Jesus said to her, “Mary!” She turned and said to him in Hebrew,<sup>[b]</sup> “Rabbouni!” (which means Teacher). <sup>17</sup> 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.’” <sup>18</sup> 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.

**Let us Pray:**

Come, O Holy Spirit, come.  
Come as the fire and burn,  
Come as the wind and cleanse,  
Come as the light and reveal,  
Convict us, Convert us, Consecrate us...until we are wholly thine.

And now, Lord, my prayer is simply this:  
That the words of my mouth  
And the words of all our hearts will be found pleasing and acceptable to you,  
for you are our rock and our redeemer...Amen.

**[Title Slide]**

**Sermon**

Amy Strauss Downey relays the following story in the closing article of the March/April 2021’s Penn Stater magazine, it is entitled “Hope Springs Eternal”

It tells the story of their young family’s move from Happy Valley to the Lehigh Valley when relocating due to job opportunity.

**[Slide – Football Stadium]**

Their new house gave up a view of Mount Nittany & the sounds of Beaver Stadium cheers by Saturday football crowds.

Their new house had a backyard big enough for two young daughters and a son on the way.

It was a half-acre with mature flower beds, vegetable gardens, waterscapes and wildlife.

They were told the property was once a stop on the local garden tour.

**[Slide – Overgrown Yard & House]**

But when they moved in it was overgrown so much that they almost didn't sign at settlement.

Their first month was spent unpacking, renovating, and trying not to lose their kids.

When their son was born – the doubt began to creep in.

Were they too ambitious? / Could they handle this high-maintenance backyard?

They spent the next summer digging out dead shrubs & deer grazed hostas / they unearthed rusted lawn ornaments / converted various beds into grass lawn.

**[Slide – "...I didn't have the Thyme" Sign]**

One day she found a sign "I was going to plant an herb garden, but didn't have the thyme."

**[Slide – Daffodils Pushing through Ground]**

Each year she felt the cringe as daffodils broke ground – it was an omen of the labor filled months ahead.

Last spring it was no different.

Except...just as the green blades began to poke through the dirt – around mid-March – Pennsylvania (along with the rest of the globe) began shutting down to slow the spread of COVID-19.

After a few days (weeks?) of isolating they'd finally emerge to clean up some sticks and leaves.

**[Slide – 3 Images raking/weeding/gardening]**

There was raking, weeding, mulching - & - fresh air.

Yardwork – something once dreaded – became therapeutic.

Yardwork became an escape from in-home schooling & Zoom calls.

**[Slide – 3 Images hammock/seed planting/child watering]**

Their daughters potted petunia & marigold seeds – their now toddler son watered them.

The children climbed on the koi pond / swung on the hammock / built "rock hotels" for bugs.

As Downey writes, "Shoes were dirty and spirits happy."

Downey concludes the article with these words,

**[Slide – 6 Circled Images of Vibrant Flowering Plants]**

"[D]espite the world pausing, our property continued to bloom. The colors came so quickly that plant production felt like a production plant. We sniffed lilac and peony bouquets and watched as rhododendron buds grew into violet trusses. Our time spent outside was marked

not by a day or month, but by the brilliant arrivals of sunny forsythia or flowery pink magnolias. It carried on like this into summer.

Throughout the pandemic, I noticed other well-tended yards. At a time when we were told to distance ourselves – and for those of us who were fortunate to do so at home – here we all were, still connecting with living things in the most basic way.

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As for *this* spring, when our sleepy daffodils wake and shake loose from their buried bulbs, I'll be ready and waiting."

**[Slide – Mary & Jesus Painting "St. Johns Bible Depiction"]**

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"...[S]upposing him to be the gardener, [Mary] said to [Jesus], 'Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away.'"

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We – in our 21<sup>st</sup> century hindsight – have the benefit of appreciating this anticipatory moment in John's good news (gospel) book which tells the story of Jesus the Christ's life, death, resurrection & ascension for the people of faith.

We know it's Jesus.

We know Mary doesn't know it's Jesus.

We know Jesus is going to make the big reveal & Mary's mourning this morning will turn to joy.

But that's not how life works – is it?

We don't know – when in the middle of it –

that mourning will turn to joy –

that sadness can morph one day into gladness –

that darkness will cede itself to light –

that the one who knows us by name is nearby ... even in deeply pain-filled moments.

That's one of the things I like about this gospel account between Mary & Jesus – in the garden – it's not so much about Easter as it is about life...more specifically it's about faith in real life.

What do we believe? / How does belief impact us? / Can life take root in what we deem to be death-like circumstance?

Like Mary – when in the middle of it all – we don't often know what we believe – or – at the very least have difficulty putting it into words.

**[Slide – Mary & Jesus Painting He Qi's "Do Not Hold on to Me"]**

And then something happens – we hear it – for Mary it was Jesus speaking her name – for us it might be the note, phone call, text message, email, impromptu plate of brownies from someone at just the right moment – letting us know we're not alone...

That's what it is to be God's people – Easter people – new life witness bearing people who – people committed to providing solidarity and solace and service in the midst of real-life circumstance...until...

mourning turns to joy –  
sadness morphs into gladness –  
darkness cedes itself to light –

Until we recognize – that the one who knows us by name is nearby –

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Mary entered that garden not expecting to find life...though when she discovered that she was not alone life took on new meaning.

Mary understood because of that encounter – like sleepy daffodils awaking and shaking loose from their buried bulbs – if one is ready and waiting – one might connect with living & life-giving things – and by God's grace so will we.

So. Will. We.

Amen & Alleluia!