

A Good Enough Faith – John 20:1-18

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Over the last six weeks of the Lenten season, we focused on themes centered around the idea that what's not most important is climbing any ladder of success (professional, personal, or spiritual) but simply nurturing our lives wherever we find ourselves on the ladder of life.

Our lives need not be perfect, absent of any missteps, failures, or sufferings. We would never wish these moments for ourselves or others, of course. Sometimes, though, they are unavoidable. We can live with our imperfections, though, because what's most important to us has already been achieved—but by somebody else on our behalf.

On the cross and in the empty tomb, somebody else has forgiven our mistakes and given us the gift of new beginnings. That is Christ, who has granted us redemption and victory over anything that would get in the way of new life. That is good news and grants us license to proclaim, therefore, that our life and our faith are “good enough.”

In the Easter narrative from John 20, we know the story. When Mary came to the tomb on the first day of the week, she found it empty. She runs to tell Peter and another disciple. They all rush back to the tomb to find only the linen clothes that had been wrapped around Jesus' dead body.

After the disciples leave the scene, Mary remains and weeps because she thinks Jesus' body has been stolen. At one point, she sees Jesus there and thinks he's the gardener.

The gardener. Fitting, isn't it, that she associates Jesus with a gardener. We've been talking about the need to tend to our own gardens wherever we are, rather than focusing on moving up the ladder.

Gardeners have so many unique characteristics. In one of their last devotions in *Good Enough*, Kate Bowler and Jessica Ritchie speak about this. In an entry titled, “A Good Gardener,” they describe the significance of Jesus being confused by Mary as the gardener.

“Maybe it's because he stole the gardener's clothes, since his were stripped and gambled over. Maybe because where Jesus was crucified was a garden. A tiny, beautiful detail that reminds us that death is never too far from new life. Maybe Jesus looks like his dad, who tended Eden barefoot. Maybe Jesus looks like the new Adam, the head gardener for the new Eden of the new heavens and new earth.

“Maybe it's because he carries the pruning shears of a vinedresser, the careful tender of our souls, ready to plant, uproot and cut back. Maybe he looks ready to cultivate new life, to pull us toward resurrection with his fingers digging in among the worms.

“Or maybe this gardener looks like he knows something about hope—hope that Mary desperately needs.

“A gardener knows the kind of hope it takes to sow a seed in the ground, to cover it with manure, to bury it in the cold winter dirt surrounded by naked trees. To leave it be for months, trusting that with the magic amount of water, air and time something new will be born out of a single seed.

“A seed doesn’t taste very good or have any real nutritional value. It really has no purpose until it’s planted by a good gardener. Yet inside a tiny seed is all the genetic information needed to grow into a complete plant. And, under the right conditions, this tiny special seed will sprout and root, bud and bloom. What grows might provide food, shelter, or awe.

“But the first step to creating life from this insignificant genetic package? *You must bury it.*

“A seed reaches its potential only when it is buried. When things look most lost, most dark, most covered, most long-gone, most hopeless...that’s when the seed is undergoing the most important change. Through its death, it might produce much fruit.”

With this in mind, Jesus as the gardener seems to be a perfect illustration. The seed of new life was buried in his death and went through such a change that it went on to bear tremendous fruit. That fruit is realized in the church, it is realized in the history of civilization, and it is realized in the lives of every human being who yearns for a new beginning. It is for every person who has seen death and destruction up close and is willing to believe that new life is out there for them.

It is in the possibility that something new and fruitful can grow again. And it comes because, while he looked to be a gardener, he was the resurrected Jesus.

Once again, Jesus is the instigator of the new life granted to us all.

That is a hard reality to accept. At our very core as human beings, it’s hard to accept the fact that somebody else, not ourselves, is the one with our destiny in his hands. It’s difficult for us to say that our faith is “good enough,” that we will let somebody else do the heavy lifting—the planting of the seed, the nurturing of the seed in the ground, and the delicate work of seeing something new grow.

The work of turning something dead into something living is not ours to do. Thank God, it’s for the divine. But are we willing to let it happen?

Barbara Brown Taylor once wrote, God “is not in the business of granting wishes. God is in the business of raising the dead, not all of whom are willing.” (Christianity Today, April 27, 1998, 93)

Are we willing to say, “Our faith is good enough, and I’m going to let God do the heavy lifting here?”

This is the glory of Easter: Much of the deadness around us is unable to be treated by anything other than morticians—the official ones or the unofficial ones like you and I who view what is no longer living, remember, and mourn.

There is only one who can make the dead to come alive. It is the resurrected Christ. Are we willing to be raised?

Many would see the world today and claim that it isn't "good enough." It isn't worthy of being raised in all its deadness. We have war in another part of the globe, we have economic uncertainty, increased crime in our streets, a stable if not growing cultural divide, lingering health concerns due to Covid and its variants. I talk with many people only to see their gloom and discouragement for the future.

There's no chance, we seem to be inferring, for a resurrection. There's no chance that the world will experience new life. There's no chance that what is dead and again become alive.

The empty tomb of Jesus, though, tells us that this miracle can happen. There can be a resurgence, there can be new growth. The work of an almighty and loving God to take what is dead, bury it, and do something amazing that it comes to life in glory is the sunshine to our darkness, a bright new morning after a long and dark night.

Yes, this world, this faith, this creation is good enough to be resurrected. Not merely resuscitated, but resurrected.

"Former British Prime Minister Winston Churchill had planned his funeral, which took place in Saint Paul's Cathedral. He included many of the great hymns of the church and used the eloquent Anglican liturgy. At his direction, a bugler, positioned high in the dome of Saint Paul's, intoned, after the benediction, the sound of "Taps," the universal signal that says the day is over. But then came the most dramatic turn: As Churchill instructed, as soon as "Taps" was finished, another bugler, placed on the other side of the great dome, played the notes of "Reveille" - "It's time to get up. It's time to get up. It's time to get up in the morning." That was Churchill's testimony that at the end of history, the last note will not be "Taps," it will be "Reveille." The worst things are never the last things."-John Claypool in Leadership, Vol. 12, No.1.

A father took his little boy to the animal rescue shelter to pick out a puppy for his birthday present. For half an hour he looked at the assortment available to him.

"Decided which one you want?" asked his Daddy. "Yes," the little fellow replied, pointing to one that was enthusiastically wagging his tail.

"I want the one with the happy ending."

For all the tears of sorrow, disappointment, and tragedy, Easter is a happy ending.

Jesus Christ is risen today! Alleluia! Amen.