

“Access to Eden - Restored!”

**Grace, mercy and peace to you from God our Father and our Lord and savior Jesus Christ!
Amen!**

Read: ¹⁰ Then the disciples went back to their homes, ¹¹ but Mary stood outside the tomb crying. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb ¹² and saw two angels in white, seated where Jesus' body had been, one at the head and the other at the foot. ¹³ They asked her, “Woman, why are you crying?” “They have taken my Lord away,” she said, “and I don't know where they have put him.” ¹⁴ **At this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not realize that it was Jesus.** ¹⁵ **“Woman,” he said, “why are you crying? Who is it you are looking for?” Thinking he was the gardener, she said, “Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have put him, and I will get him.”** ¹⁶ **Jesus said to her, “Mary.” She turned toward him and cried out in Aramaic, “Rabboni!” (Which means Teacher).**

Pray: Father, thank you that you know each person here intimately and call each of us by name. Pour out your Holy Spirit on us all today that our eyes may be opened to see Jesus in all His glory and splendour and live in the victory of the resurrection every day of our lives. In Jesus' name, Amen!

1. Garden tomb in Israel.

He is risen! **He is risen indeed!**

What a wonderful celebration it is today. Jesus has risen from the dead, the tomb is empty. **Praise the Lord!**

A few years back my mother in-law travelled to Israel. And when she got back she was sharing with me the excitement of the various tours she had been on.

On one of those tours the guide took the people to a few of the potential sites of the resurrection of Jesus. One of these sights is the garden tomb. And as she described it to me, I could see the excitement of potentially being in that beautiful garden where Mary Magdalene had mistaken Jesus as the gardener all those years ago. The same place where Mary had peered into the empty tomb and saw two angels seated where Jesus' body had been.

2. A quick re-cap of another garden.

Whether you're a green thumb or not, a garden (should be) a place of life and growth, a place of flourishing - shouldn't it? That was how it was in the original garden, the Garden of Eden where Adam and Eve walked with God in the cool of the day.

- There was a perfect relationship with God in that garden.
- There was perfect freedom, perfect peace.
- There was no chaos or instability, but everything was ordered just as God had made it.
- People weren't in a mad rush running here and there – instead they rested with God - It was perfect!

Then everything went pear shaped (apple shaped?) didn't it?

Human's found themselves 'east of Eden' – out of the garden. That meant that the angel encountered in the original garden was there **to keep people out** with a flaming sword that no-one could get past. Not only that, ever since people have wondered where the Garden of Eden might be; and how they could gain access to that tree of life standing in the garden. Documentaries have speculated and tried to pin point where it may have been in relation to the great rivers the bible names that surrounded the garden.

But no matter how hard we try, no matter how high res the satellite imagery has become...no matter how hard men and women strive - no-one has been able to locate, let alone gain access to Eden.

3. In John's gospel account today, Mary Magdalene runs into a gardener while she was looking for Jesus. It's a bit of a surprise isn't it? A gardener!?

“Access to Eden - Restored!”

- Why didn't she instantly recognize the gardener as Jesus?
- Was it because she was expecting a dead body wrapped up in cloth?
- Was she expecting a body scarred from the floggings and torture Jesus had injured as he carried the punishment for our sins on Good Friday?

I wonder if like me, you had words playing in your head... **“He's not the gardener Mary! You've got it all wrong - It's Jesus!”** Why on earth does John even mention that Mary confused Jesus as a gardener? Maybe because Jesus is the ultimate gardener! He was there speaking the foundations of the world into being. He was there at the very beginning planting the original Garden of Eden... He was there walking with Adam and Eve in the cool of the day.

In perfect relationship.

And today, the one Mary thought was a gardener, has overcome death and left the garden tomb empty.

4. And it's as we peer with Mary into the empty tomb, we see that access to Eden has been restored!

Instead of a flaming sword to keep people out of the garden, the angels in the tomb of Jesus asked Mary in our reading, **“Why are you crying?”** They were there with good news! Great news! Thieves didn't steal the body of Jesus - just as friends hadn't come and removed Jesus' body from the tomb. **God the Father raised Jesus from the dead. Jesus is alive!**

Death has been defeated! Jesus was raised from death to everlasting life and glory to reign as king forever. Your King!

Broken relationships between God and humanity have been restored!

What does that mean for you and me? ***Reconciliation and restoration have taken place.***

- *We who were expelled from the Garden of Eden because of our rebellion and stubborn sinfulness have been restored to both the Garden and the Gardener!*
- *The relationship has been restored – not by us, but through the death and resurrection of Jesus.*
- *Through that empty garden tomb.*

And so we walk confidently in the cool and the heat of our days (good and hard times) knowing that God is with us and for us and walking beside us.

5. This you can celebrate and be certain!

Jesus called out Mary Magdalene by name in our reading and what happened to her? **All Jesus said was, “Mary!” and her eyes are opened.** Jesus also knows you and has called you out by name. He did it personally when he put His name on you and claimed you as His own - marking you with the sign of the cross. ***Your baptism is your own personal experience of Easter!***

When you were baptized, as God sees it, Jesus picked you up and took you to the cross with him, and when he died on Good Friday, so did you! Your old selfish self, your sinful nature, it is now dead and buried with Jesus in the tomb, and that's where it is meant to stay! And when Jesus walked out of the tomb on Easter morning he had you in his arms, he brought a “new you” with him, a new creation, a new life to live with him and for him already now in this life.

That new life means you can walk confidently each day knowing that at every moment you are:

- forgiven by God,
- at every moment you are safe with God and saved for all eternity,
- That you have been blessed to be a blessing to others and share your joy with them!
- and at every moment he is with you in every situation.

Every day has a pattern about it for you as baptized people, **the pattern of Easter.**

- It is a pattern of dying and rising.
- Dying to old negative thoughts,
- old self centered habits,
- dying to any trust in our material possessions and greed,

“Access to Eden - Restored!”

- Dying to anything sinful and anti-god and anything that leads to spiritual death in your life.

And then rising - rising with Jesus in the power that raised him from the dead. Rising to live your life with God and for God and in ways that breathe life - not death to people around you.

Easter is about a death and a resurrection, Jesus' death and resurrection.

The empty tomb that has re-opened access to Eden and restored our relationship with our Heavenly Father.

Baptism is about your death and resurrection. Your dying and rising to a new life, which began when you were baptized...continues every day since to this very moment – and until you breathe your last in this life. To live as a baptized person is to live in the power of Easter, the power that raised Jesus from the dead and left the garden tomb empty.

A power that is there and available for you every day. So once again. He is risen!

I hope those words sound different to you as you think about your baptism. Or if you're here today and you haven't been baptized – the Easter message is for you too. Baptism, uniting you to the death and the glorious resurrection and life in Jesus is open to you too.

There is no place, no life that the message of Easter can't penetrate and transform. Such is the glory and power of God!

6. Remember 1 thing.

As we gaze through the opening of the empty tomb, we can see that Jesus has re-opened access to Eden restoring our *relationship* with our Heavenly Father.

Your connection to Easter is through your baptism where God has freed you from death and given you a new and better way - living in the power of the resurrection of Jesus – not just today, but every day of your life.

He is risen indeed! Amen!

And the peace of God which surpasses all human understanding keep your hearts and minds safe in Christ Jesus our Lord and the awesome power of His resurrection-at work in your life. Amen.