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Easter 2023

Dear friends in Christ,

In the gospel of John's telling of the resurrection, Mary Magdalen didn't recognize the risen Jesus at first. She thought he was the gardener. Why a gardener? A little earlier in the story, right after Jesus died on the cross, two of his friends took his body to be buried in a tomb in a garden. But they didn't have far to go, because John's gospel tells us that the garden was in the place where Jesus was crucified. There was a garden in Golgotha—a garden in the place of the skull.

Imagine a dark and dreary hill soaked with the aftermath of countless unspeakable acts of violence like those committed against Jesus, and in the midst of it a garden – probably small, but green, maybe even colourful and lush, certainly abundant enough to justify having a gardener tending it.

That garden at Golgotha likely went unnoticed by most people. But perhaps over a very long time, the garden slowly reclaimed bits of the place of the skull. At other times it probably lost ground. Maybe most of the time its deeply rooted life was simply able to hold the mortifying effects of the rest of Golgotha at bay.

That might be all we'll be able to do in these days we've been given: tend with hope our little gardens of life in the midst of the death and darkness that surround us, not ignoring or turning our backs on the world or others, but seeking to transform our modest patch of the world—our household, our community, our church—into a small plot of God's kingdom on earth.

For some of us that may mean literally growing a garden, maybe even learning to grow our own food again. It will also mean growing in other ways. The late Quebec theologian Gregory Baum talked about our Christian calling in times such as these as being socially engaged, building networks of resistance, creating communities of friendship and service, and promoting a counter-culture of social solidarity.

And not on a grand, society-changing scale, but rather at the level of one person, one household, one community, one church, one garden at a time. And the deeper our roots in a place, the better we'll be able to hold the forces of death and destruction and darkness at bay, and maybe even reclaim some ground and give it the chance for new life.

There was a garden in the place where Jesus was crucified. And it was in that garden, surrounded on every side by death, that death was defeated—but in such a quiet and understated way that hardly anyone noticed. Our efforts at pushing back against death will also likely seem slow, small, and unremarkable, but they too can still bring forth life.

The Life that quietly came forth from that garden in Golgotha that Easter morning forever robbed death of its ultimate power. In that sure and certain hope, we can work to help transform the world into the garden of abundant life that God desires for all creation, one small plot of soil at a time.

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