

The Gardener

*Early in the morning, on the first day, while it was still dark, Mary
Magdalene came to the tomb*

She thought he was the gardener ...

hands raw and calloused, dirt still pushed beneath his fingernails, smelling
of earth and compost and grass as new and green as springtime.

*I believe it is comforting to remember that Easter always begins in
darkness*

*After the anguished and violent darkness of Good Friday
After the empty and despairing darkness of Holy Saturday
Easter too begins in darkness
with a journey towards our pain*

With a nagging urge to honor our loss and our emptiness with presence

She thought he was the gardener ...

a voice that brings forth daffodils; that speaks of lilies in the field and
sparrows in the branches, a voice as warm as sunshine and as gentle as a
newly emerging leaf

They have taken my Lord and I do not know where to find him she says

How many of us come to Easter looking for something?

We know grief - we are looking for a word of hope

We know loss - we are looking for a word of life

We know sorrow - we are looking for a word of joy

We know doubt - we are looking for a word of faith

Something has taken the light and we do not know where to find it.

She thought he was the gardener ...

His feet were firmly grounded, hair wild from working the soil, arms
reaching out for her, encouraging her grief to blossom into life.

From dark and lifeless earth, he is sprouting eternity.
From matter destined for decay, he is sowing nourishing life.
From rock and dust and bone, dry as death, he is coaxing a garden of
breath...
of hope...
of life ...
of faith ...
of joy...

Watered with tears and blood and sorrow born of violence, a rose is
springing from the stump of Jesse

and sprouting wings

*We are so often searching for the light that sprouts wings, looking for
Easter we don't know where to find it
And yet, so often, the light is right in front of us
Clothed in what looks like ordinariness
Just like Easter begins with darkness,
Often hope begins with what's in front of us
A gift wrapped in the guise of the familiar*

She thought he was the gardener ...

a miracle worker who cultivates beauty in the shadow of death
a humble servant of life that springs up in the face of a world that longs to
crush and bleed and destroy
a flower blooming in a crack of a stone

*I met Jesus once at the Department of Vital Records in St. Louis Missouri
almost 20 years ago*

*It was a place of darkness for me if ever there was one
It was late fall - a time of cold, gray bare trees, shortening days,
and my marriage was dying - after less than two years
I longed to have a baby; but that wasn't happening either
And I was there because I needed my birth certificate so I could prove that I
was eligible to work in a dismal job that I was lousy at*

*It was just before dark and I was tired from a day of banging my head
against the wall at work and needing to get home to bang my head against
a different wall*

And, of course, the line was out the door

I remember the feeling of hopelessness in that place

It seemed like half the lights were out

*It smelled of decay and mildew and a hundred years without fresh air
How ironic that we were all there to get a birth certificate - it felt like a tomb*

I waited in line for at least an hour and it was almost my turn

But the man in front of me was holding things up.

*He couldn't fill out the form he had been given at the start of the line
Because he was blind and without someone there who could help him*

and he needed to have his daughter's birth certificate

She thought he was the gardener

*I can't remember the reason this distraught man needed the birth
certificate but I do remember it was urgent - felt like life and death almost*

*And the clerk behind the window - with a voice that sounded as cold and
dead as an automated operator was explaining again and again to him that
she was not allowed to fill out the form for him.*

She thought he was the gardener

It took me a long while to grasp the situation

*So bewildered by grief and the crypt like atmosphere of the room
So numb with hopelessness that I was confused and unable to see past my
desperate need to get out of that place*

*After I began to slowly gain some consciousness, like rising out of a dark
dream, I began to understand that someone needed to fill out the form for
this man -*

*that the clerk who was saying the same thing at an increasingly high
volume was trying to communicate this necessity to the rest of us standing
in line.*

She thought he was the gardener

Much more out of a driving need to be somewhere else than out of any kind of virtue and after it became apparent that no one else was volunteering, I spoke up and asked if I could fill out the form for him. The clerk nodded in collapsed relief and the man reached out for me gushing gratitude.

It took less than three minutes to write down the information he gave to me. He was able to finish his transaction and somehow, again I don't know how - maybe he had a cane? - make his way out of that God-forsaken room and into the hallway and out into the November evening.

I was next and I handed her my form and reached for my wallet to pay she slid my receipt across the counter to me shaking her head almost imperceptibly "You're all set," she said.

Again, it took me a moment to get that she was sending me on my way without charging me "Your birth certificate will come in the mail in a couple of weeks." I nodded dumbly and made my own way out the door and into the hallway.

It was dark by now. There was an enormous line for the elevator. I opted for the stairs, acknowledging my uneasiness with heading into a dark and solitary stairwell alone but I just couldn't wait in another line.

She thought he was the gardener

*It was there.
In the stairwell
that I met him
Not the blind man - he was long gone - and not a lurker or any visible person in the grey and echoing corridor*

*It was Jesus - somehow - I'm pretty sure it was Jesus
goosebumps and a wave of gratitude and joy and life and tears and my hair
standing up on end.*

*I cannot describe it
It was like he called my name.*

Mary thought he was the gardener ...

bursting with the power of newness, with the energy of growing things,
radiant with the light of eternal dawn.

*That encounter that left me weeping in the stairwell didn't fix all of my
problems.*

*It wasn't anything more dramatic than that wave of something else,
that wave of Easter in the midst of the tomb
I did later have a baby, my oldest, Devin
yet my marriage still ended four years later
but its never left me and it started changing me then
and its still changing me now*

She thought he was the gardener ...

In the delirium of her grief, she saw the truth beyond the fact;
the core of who he was all along

the One who tended the rocky and trampled soil of her heart into a lush and
light filled sanctuary

From desolation he has cultivated abundance

From oppression he has harvested freedom

From fear he has gleaned courage

From apathy he has propagated passion

From resentment he has produced overwhelming love

She thought he was the gardener...

And then he said her name and she opened like a flower to the sun.

She thought he was the gardener...

She was right.