

W Thomas - Easter Sunday Sermon April 12, 2020 (during the time of the COVID lockdown).

Alleluia, Christ is risen. The Lord is risen indeed. Alleluia.

I'm ringing a bell out here, standing in what I hope is a garden as the sun rises behind me. Perhaps you in your own homes or wherever you are, as you watch this, you've taken your car keys out or found some bells or just are generally excited that it is Easter day, the Sunday of the resurrection. And here we are, not in church.

Wouldn't we all like to be in a building together? Wouldn't it just, that energy would be palpable. Oh, I don't know about you. I miss it.

But at the same time, I know we are close because Jesus is close. The Gospel, according to John, is all about the deep abiding close relationship that Jesus has with us. This is what that community was experiencing as they were being pushed away from the society that they knew.

And here we are, we are in a moment where we, out of a discipline of love and care for one another, have stayed away from one another. And so it is important for us to be embraced by this close relationship we have with Christ, that love, so that we can realize it's the same love that we are showing others by not embracing them and being close with them, but caring for them via the distance of perhaps the internet, such as today, a phone call, a note, just being careful when we're around them. So let's talk about this personal relationship on this, the Sunday of the resurrection, when we celebrate the love that God has found for us, that we have experienced in Jesus Christ.

And I like to see that thought when Mary Magdalene is lost in the garden, trying to find Jesus at the tomb, trying to understand. She sees the gardener, and all of a sudden knows it's Jesus when he calls her by name. Calling her by name deepens that understanding of an abiding relationship.

There is an old hymn in the public domain that would be one of the hymns that I would enjoy singing in homes, such as nursing homes and whatever, for folks that wanted to connect deeply with something that they couldn't touch anymore, because they were confined to space. And it became a joy to learn in the garden. And the song in the garden, this hymn, is actually an Easter song about the deep abiding relationship, about coming into that garden, such as Mary Magdalene did, and finding Jesus.

And perhaps you know this song. I come to the garden alone while the dew is

still on the roses. And the voice I hear falling on my ear, the Son of God discloses.

And he walks with me, and he talks with me, and he tells me I am his own. And the joy we share as we tarry there, none other has ever known. It's a comforting piece of music, and there are more verses to it.

He speaks, and the sound of his voice is so sweet, the birds hush their singing, and the melody that he gave to me within my heart is ringing. And he walks with me, and he talks with me, and he tells me I am his own. And the joy we share as we tarry there, none other has ever known.

It's this joy that we remember on this day, this joy of being embraced, this joy of remembering that we are not abandoned, even in the midst of times that seem trying. I have this sense about God that nothing we can do can keep God from being within us in our deepest fears or our deepest pain. How deep does the cross go into the ground? Deeper than we can ask or imagine.

How broad is the embrace of Jesus' arms on the cross? Broader than we can ask or imagine. Now think about this, on a day when we celebrate, when we ring our bells and we're so filled with joy, think about how much God loves us in that God does not demand our joy from us. God yearns for us to say, thank you, I love you, I can't believe you've done all you've done for me.

God is not capricious. God is caring. God is loving.

Sometimes it doesn't seem that way, but when we step back and find ourselves in the garden, we remember again the closeness of that relationship and remember that we are not alone and that nothing, as the apostle Paul writes, can separate us from the love of God. And I believe that's what this hymn in the garden is all about. And it closes with one verse, which is as if we were with Jesus the whole day long in the garden.

I'd stay in the garden with him, though the night around me be falling. But he bids me go through the voice of woe, his voice to me is calling. And he walks with me and he talks with me and he tells me I am his own.

And the joy we share as we tarry there, none other has ever known. Through the woe, he bids me lead my life, but also the hymn, the scripture, all that we know about Jesus, we are not alone. Alleluia, Alleluia, Alleluia.

Christ is risen. Alleluia, Alleluia. This is indeed what we celebrate and remember this day.

Take it deep into our hearts and have it with us always. All these words I offer in the name of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.