

the Rev. Karen Millard
Squamish United Church

April 25th, 2010

Readings - Easter Sunday
Isaiah 58 **the Message**
Matthew 6:25-34

Watered Gardens

I have taken much of today's service from "May I have this dance?" by Joyce Rupp. Joyce reminds us that "The human spirit is much like a spring garden. If growth is to happen, it too must be made ready. The human spirit must be opened up if God's goodness is to grow there. Open minds and hearts are ready to receive the abundant life God constantly offers."

In planting in the spring "after a long hard winter the ground can be packed solid from heavy snows or pelting, drenching rains. The soil can be difficult to turn over. It resists the hoe or the garden tiller and it may take many hours of tiring work before the earth is soft and porous.

This part of the gardening is essential, however, if green shoots are to push their way through the soil. A garden that has a hard packed surface will not be able to receive the life-giving moisture of the spring rains. The water will run off and fail to soak the soil. Earth that is turned over is essential for garden's watering" and ultimately for growth.

Growth and being opened up to life are what the story of Easter is all about. Easter begins with a tomb that is broken wide open. "Beside it stands a messenger of God asking compassionate women to open their inner selves, encouraging them to not be afraid. As they listen they hear a profound and startling message: "He is not here, for he has risen..." Matt 28:6.

As their minds and hearts struggle to accept his tremendous surprise they are like gardens being readied for watering. The women open their hearts to the great announcement, receive the word of resurrection like thirsty soil, and hurry away to share the marvelous news with others."

"Not all who walked with Jesus were ready to receive this incredible news." Just like us at times the "soil of their hearts was not receptive." So often we are like Thomas doubting, or Mary of Magdala who is even searching for Jesus and doesn't recognize him when he is right in front of her. Jesus appears again and again to disciples and travelers who don't recognize him because they are too caught up in their own grief, or business or dashed hopes.

God like Jesus rarely shows up the way we expect him too. And yet like Jesus God tills the soils of our hearts - nudging us in our spirit, calling us out with questions and

wonderings, longing to open us up to abundance. So often we have preconceived notions of how life should go. When it does not happen that way we feel abandoned. And yet growth requires change and adapting. "Accepting change and new attitudes in friends, spouses, colleagues, clients, children, or students may be challenging. WE can hope for a change and yet, when it happens, we may doubt it or refuse to accept it. It can be as simple as questioning the motivations behind expressed kindness and concern, or as compels as trying to trust the recovery of one who has gone through rehabilitation for an addiction.

The inability to be open to change and to surprise is everywhere in life." The unfortunate thing is at times it seems most alive in the church and yet it seems to me to be in direct opposition of our transformative life-giving, resurrection story. We are to be "easter people open being watered by the surprising grace of God."

Often we are afraid that if we open ourselves up to a new way it may fail or we might get hurt. If that happens we may feel or look incompetent or foolish. Joyce Rupp asks "What happens when a man opens himself to his emotions and allows himself to cry before others? Who supports the teacher who maintains a stance of compassion and patience with a rebellious student who constantly disrupts the school system How open is a medical staff to a doctor who senses intuitively that a radically different approach might help a patient? How do young parents, preoccupied with the stress of financial responsibilities, remain open to the joy and beauty of their children's daily growth? How many people refuse to allow a drug or criminal rehabilitation house in their neighborhood? Who stays open to the potential for these people to grow beyond their past?" Who is willing to be open to a new way of experiencing the holy?

And what about us personally - Are we able to be open? Do we have the potential for growth and learning? What if our soil is dry and cracked? What if we are tired of being tilled? Is it really possible for something new to bloom within us? Are we really able to rise up out of the death of ourselves in our pasts? So often "We refuse to believe that our inner garden has great potential for growth if its soil is turned over and seeded with hope and trust."

Nothing will prevent personal growth and transformation more than a closed mind and heart. Every seed that is planted must seek for and work it's way towards the light so that it can bloom. If we remain hidden in the dark and cold underground frozen underneath the hard winter soil of life we will not live the abundant life of our faith.

"Most of us are closed at one time or another. We all seek safety in certain areas of our lives. It is a natural human response. In our desire for security, we sometimes fight the call to grow and to change. It take trust to open up and to be receptive to Easter moments.

In our personal experiences of resurrection, there is the element of surrender and of vulnerability. We are required to let go of our own agenda. WE would like to plan this

watering and refreshing of our souls ourselves. Just as surely as we find the date for Easter on the calendar, we want to know when our hearts will be filled with joy again.

We also need to let go of our fearful questions: If I open up, will I be watered and nourished? Or will I be left open to dry out? Will I be barren and empty? Or will I be drenched and swallowed up by rains that never seem to stop? It can be difficult to let go of our insecurity. We are called to wait, to be open, expectant, and ready, believing with all our hearts that new growth will come.” Believing God is with us, watering our souls with love and grace, nourishing us each step of the way for the journey of life.

I am going to invite you to join me in a guided prayer. As we pray I'll invite to imagine yourself in different places and situations. Journey with me. If your mind wanders just bring it back to the moment of worship and calm yourself again and listen to my voice. If you are not comfortable in this prayer I invite you to pray in your own way - do not get distracted by method - take in the moment. We will end with a time of silence and then I will call you out with the ringing of the prayer bowl.