

JOHN 20

In the Garden

J. R. R. Tolkien coined the term eucatastrophe to describe the type of story whereby the hero(es) are at the brink of disaster. There is no way, the reader rationalizes, they can survive or grasp victory. This works well in Middle Earth, it is even better at Calvary. The hero of the Four Gospels is executed. He isn't exonerated or delivered but murdered. The Disciples understood what happened and so they went into hiding. Their entire movement was over and now they are the hunted.

Resurrection morning is the greatest eucatastrophe in history. Christ is risen from the dead!

John's telling of the empty tomb began in a garden (see vs. 15). Mary Magdalene came looking for death but encountered Christ in a place teeming with life. She first found the tomb empty and ran to tell the Disciples. Both Peter and John race (literally) to see for themselves. All that is left in the tomb were the linen cloths. Jesus was alive, he no longer needed the garments of a dead man.

The men returned confused while Mary Magdalene lingered to weep (vs. 11). She then turned around and saw Jesus (vs. 14) but confused him with a gardener. She assumed the missing body was the result of a grave robbery, not resurrection. Dead bodies do not come back to life. Humans have always understood basic science.

But when Jesus spoke to her (vs. 16), she realized exactly who this was. *Rabboni*, she exclaims. The irony of Jesus as the gardener is evident from a broad perspective of Scripture. The Bible opens with mankind in a Garden wherein sin introduced death and God offered a substitutionary sacrifice as a result. Now we see the substitutionary sacrificed act as a gardener in his defeat of death.

Jesus then appeared to the Twelve Disciples on two different occasions. The first is without Thomas present (vs. 19-23) and the second is with him present (vs. 24-29). On both occasions, Jesus greeted his followers by saying, *Peace be with you* (vs. 19, 21, 26). Although a typical Jewish greeting, it speaks volume of what has happened. Eden was the embodiment of peace whereby man and God walked together in unity and love. Sin has robbed the earth of "shalom" (Hebrew for "peace"). Despite man's best efforts (legalism, libertarianism, politics, tribalism, conquest, etc.), genuine peace and rest remained out of reach. When Jesus appeared to his followers, he gave peace.

Jesus's encounter with Thomas is perhaps the best known part of this narrative. Forever known as "Doubting Thomas" this is the only place where Thomas demonstrates any doubt. Luke tells us that all of the Disciples were shown Jesus's wounds (Luke 24:40). The motivation for this hesitation is obvious. The dead do not return from the grave. Even the ancients understood that. There must be

some other explanation. Jesus's answer is to emphasize the physical nature of his return. Jesus was not raised spiritually, but physically – the first fruit of our resurrection.

What matters most is Thomas's conclusion, "My Lord and my God!" If the resurrection means anything, it means this. Therefore, the resurrection of Christ requires a response. One can reject it or deny it. Accepting it means salvation and worship. There is no middle ground when it comes to Christ.

Jesus said to him, "Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed." (vs. 29)

In John's conclusion, he emphasized all of this. "*Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book;³¹ but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.*" No doubt the reader wants more, but what John has shared is more than enough to metaphorically chew on. What matters is not the quantity of incredible stories, but what we do with them. The Gospel of John was written to convict, not entertain.

Let the reader understand and believe.