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## *The Good Gardener: A Tribute to Mary Wayne Dixon*

**A homily by the Rev. Canon George Maxwell  
at the funeral of Mary Wayne Dixon**

*I lift up my eyes to the hills;  
From where is my help to come?*

*My help comes from the Lord,  
the maker of heaven and earth.*

These are the first words we heard when we prayed psalm 121 together.  
They tell us something important about Mary Wayne.

Here's the thing.

A good gardener cannot create a beautiful flower.

She can prepare the ground.  
She can clear the weeds.  
She can nourish the soil.  
She can plant the seed,  
water the sprout,  
make sure the sun shines,  
and prune the blossoms.

But she cannot make the plant grow.

A good gardener knows that only God can make a beautiful flower.  
A good gardener trusts that, in time, a flower will appear.  
A flower with a beauty she could never have fully imagined on her own.  
And then she knows how to rejoice.  
She eagerly gives herself over to the awe and wonder of what God has done in her garden.

And yet,  
even though a good gardener knows that she did not create the beautiful flower,  
it does bear her mark.  
It would not be there without her,  
and she sees something of herself in it.

As it grows,  
the flower finds its own strength.  
Its own shape.  
Its own colors.

In this way, every flower tells two stories at once:  
the story of the creative Love who gave it life,  
and the gardener who paid attention and tended to it.

The poet Mary Oliver once wrote:

"It doesn't have to be the blue iris.  
It could be weeds in a vacant lot.  
Just pay attention."

That's the gardener's gift—paying attention and caring for what's given to you.  
Showing up, season after season.  
Not always with perfect answers or flawless technique,  
but always with presence.  
With patience.  
With care.

That's what I hear in the stories you tell about Mary Wayne.

Mary Wayne loved gardens in the literal sense—  
her peonies, camellias, and daisies.

She gave her imagination and her energy  
to the Atlanta Botanical Garden,  
when its offices were still in a trailer  
and it still needed people to believe in it.

She chaired the Garden of Eden Ball.

She became known as  
"the spirit of the Garden."

But she was also a gardener of people.  
She cultivated friendships.  
She brought people together.  
She made beauty a gathering place for community.

As you know, Mary Wayne's most radiant flowers are here with us:  
her daughter, Ginger,  
and her grandsons, Dixon and Tucker.

Each has grown in their own way,  
bent toward the sun in their own direction.  
Yet, like every bloom in Mary Wayne's gardens,  
they carry her story too.

The gift of cultivating beauty,  
of calling forth strength,  
of believing in growth—  
this gift has been passed on.  
And joyfully received.

Mary Wayne promised not to leave  
before she taught her family  
everything they needed to know.

She has honored that promise.

Though we will mourn her absence,  
we are ready to take over the care of the garden  
she left us.

And so, we now commend Mary Wayne  
to God's eternal garden.  
A garden where flowers never fade.  
Where what is mortal is swallowed up by life.

And we give thanks—  
for the beauty she cultivated among us.

For the love she tended in her family.  
For the community she drew together.  
And for the garden she left blooming in every life she touched.

Let us pray.

O God, whose beauty fills the world,  
we thank you for Mary Wayne's life among us,  
and for the steady care with which she tended her family and community.

Receive her now into the eternal garden of your love,  
where flowers never fade,  
and life is renewed forever in you.

Through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen.