
Jesus the Gardener

**An article for *The Cathedral Times*
by the Very Rev. Sam Candler, *Dean of the Cathedral***



I was honored in the early Easter morning rain this year, when someone said that the white hat I was wearing looked like a gardener's hat! Yes! I want to be a good gardener! When Mary came to the tomb on that first Easter morning, she spoke with Jesus without recognizing him, "supposing him to be the gardener" (John 20:15).

Two of my favorite paintings of the resurrection are one by Rembrandt, and one by Fontana, which show this very scene. There is Mary, weeping in the early dawn. And there is someone with her, but it doesn't look like the Jesus we usually see in religious paintings. When I have shown slides of those paintings to my classes, out of the blue, it is very rare that someone identifies that other person in the paintings as Jesus.

They don't recognize Jesus because he is wearing a large broad-brimmed gardener's hat! And he is clearly carrying some sort of shovel, a gardening spade. He looks like a common ordinary gardener in the paintings, just as Mary Magdalene is said to have spotted him.

Yes, Mary mistook Jesus for the gardener on that first Easter. How could she have made that mistake? She had travelled and ministered with him, maybe for three years. She had witnessed Jesus' behavior in both hard times and easy times.

She had admired Jesus tenderly picking up children just like ... well, just as tenderly as he might be coaxing a young seedling from the ground. She had listened to Jesus carefully explain some stories just likewell, just like he might be tilling and preparing good soil. In fact, many of Jesus' stories were about the soil, and seeds, and vines and weeds and rocks.

Yes, that has to be the reason Mary saw a gardener before her! She had witnessed Jesus being a gardener throughout his ministry! Mary had seen Jesus tear into people, especially the Pharisees, just like a gardener might tear into some overgrown thicket, cutting away the old growth. Mary had seen Jesus cut into new growth, too, training and trimming the branches that were his disciples.

Mary thought Jesus was the gardener, because Jesus *is* a gardener!

I also think of gardeners this week as I remember the death of Walter Reeves. I did not know Walter Reeves; but I was sure one of his admirers, when I used to read his gardening articles in the newspaper, and when he broadcast Saturday radio shows from Pike Nurseries, "playing in the dirt again." He was a good gardener.



I hope all of us are good gardeners this time of year! I hope we are learning with Jesus how to till the soil, how to enjoy good dirt, how to plant, how to grow, how to delight in the freshness of new life. Alleluia! He is risen!

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