

May Day 2010 Christ Church, Middle Haddam the Reverend Dr. Catharine Randall (Jn13:31-35; Ps 148)

### **In the Garden**

This is a sermon for all you gardeners out there! Get out your trowels and put on those weeding gloves. Remember, Christ has just burst His three-day prison: He is the glorious bulb, buried beneath the ground, that exuberantly buds into flower on Easter Day! In the Gospel of Luke, Mary Magdalene did not recognize Jesus at first; she thought he was the gardener. Well, He is. He is the Great Gardener. God is in the Garden and today, in this glorious garden of the world He has created for us, we see Him and we praise Him!

The Catholic church,-- and we, as Anglo-Catholics or Episcopalians, are part of that tradition -- has always discerned three sources of authority: Holy Scripture, tradition and, this one is my favorite on this beautiful first Sunday of May, nature. The Jesuit poet Gerard Manley Hopkins talked of how Nature is marked with God's fingerprints. "The world is sprinkled with signs of the Beyond."

Today the Psalmist jubilantly praises God, and nature entwines like ivy around every verse:

Praise the Lord! Praise the Lord from the heavens ... Praise him, sun and moon, Praise him, all you shining stars. Praise him, you highest heavens and you waters above the skies ... Praise the Lord from the earth ... fruit trees and all cedars, wild animals and all cattle, small creatures and flying birds ... Let them praise the name of the Lord!

Since today is the first Sunday in May, I want to talk to you about Nature as our source of learning and inspiration.

The Love of Learning and the Desire for God have always gone hand in hand. But there can be a great gap between head knowledge and heart knowledge. One of our charges as Christians is to integrate the two. What we learn intellectually must, through some miracle of alchemy, be transformed into deep-seated conviction and certain faith, or “heart knowledge”. When we hear a hard passage from Christ’s words as we did this morning, when Our Lord urges us, “A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another,” we wonder, HOW? How am I to do that? I’ll tell you how: silently wait and trust, and the miracles will reveal themselves. Learning to love is not easy, but Jesus promises us that we will learn this lesson. Look for ways to love. And, especially, look about you at this glorious earth our God has made. Earth is our teacher.

We sit with those words, we meditate on them. Even if they do not seem to have meaning for us now, they will become infused with significance as we walk along the road of our pilgrim life in this world of wonder. Jesus says, “where I am going you cannot follow now, but you will follow later.” That ‘later’ is NOW: *now* we follow Him. As events happen to us, challenges present themselves, strangers wander into our midst, those words will echo in our minds and take root in our hearts and furnish strength and encouragement in times of trial, provide music when we want to sigh for joy.

And those words are not uniform in their shape and sense. Each of us comes to God in our own way. We are not “cookie-cutter Christians!” God made us for Himself, to amuse Him and to give Him glory and to be in relationship with Him, and He has made us wondrously diverse and varied. He is the great Pied Piper after whom we run, with whom we dance, and we are as dappled and pied and multi-colored in our expressions of faith as the Great Diversity that is God. Just as we do not plant our gardens with hyacinths only, or merely marigolds, so, too, in the garden of our faith there are petals of all sorts – the brave little swords of gladiolae; birds-of-paradise, a foretaste of heaven; trumpet-vine and clematis; hollyhock and heart’s ease. We are as various and abundantly bursting with life and love as the natural beauty that springs up in the month of May.

As we live and move in this haven that God has molded for us, nature offers us heavenly signposts along the way. What new possibilities are blooming, right here, right now? What new hope springs up before you? Which flowers will thrive in the soil of our salvation?

Bloom where you are planted. Plant well, and glory in what you have planted.

Happy Gardening!

Mother's Day 2010, May 9 Christ Church the Reverend Dr. Catharine Randall (Ps. 47?)

### **With Mother Mary**

Last Sunday I told you that God is in the Garden. But someone else is in the garden, too, too garden of this world, and that is Mother Mary. May is Mary's month. The Mother of God taught Him at her knee and, through the beauties of nature – foal and fawn and flower -- , Mary is also present here, to day, to each of us, as loving mother. Hail Mary!

Mother Mary is here with her arms outstretched, lilies and tulips and daffodils in her lap, love on her lips, her Son in her heart, and all of Nature sings Him.

And this is the lesson Mother Mary teaches us, too, through the Church, her Son's Body, on this beautiful Mother's Day. Sit as her knees, lean on her lap, and contemplate her wisdom. She holds all these earthly treasures in her heart. This poem from Gerard Manley Hopkins, "Mary Magnificat," (Mary praises the Lord) :

Flesh and fleece, fur and feather  
Grass and green world all together;  
Star-eyed strawberry-breasted  
Throstle above her nested  
Cluster of bugle blue eggs thin  
Forms and warms the life within  
And bird and blossom swell

In sod or sheath or shell.

All things rising, all things sizing

Mary sees, sympathizing

With that world of good,

Nature's motherhood.

Their magnifying of each its kind

With delight she calls to mind

How she did in her stored

Magnify the Lord.

Well, but there was more than this

Spring's universal bliss

Much, had much to say

To offering Mary May.