

Go Grow a Garden

Fr. Thomas Ryden

April 12, 2026

Apostles Anglican Church

Scriptures: Genesis 8:6–16; 9:8–16; Psalm 111; I Peter 1:3–9; John 20:19–31

On this second Sunday of Easter, I hope your feasting has not stopped! One of the things that I love about the church calendar is that the celebration that was before limited to one day overflows into an entire season. So let us feast well. But don't get stuck in feasting malaise. Growing up the malaise started about 2:30/3:00 on Easter Sunday at my grandma's house, full of ham and potatoes sitting in a recliner with Charlton Heston on TV playing Moses or Ben Hurr, me half asleep. Church was over, the egg hunt was over, and I had school the next day. I was just existing. The theme of the hour was "Now what?"

"Now what?" That is a common question in the wake of a big event. "What's next?" "What do I do now?" These can be natural questions for us in the Easter season. And coming off of a Lenten season defined by disciplines and fasts, these questions make sense. We might be feeling the gap that those practices filled.

And so I will offer some advice appropriate for the life-filled season of Easter. Grow a garden.

Now it is probably fine to take that advice literally. It is indeed the time to start growing things in the ground and bless you if that is your gift. It is not mine. The green thumb is not something that runs in my family, and while I am very grateful

for those who grow all the food that I eat that comes from the ground, I am pretty helpless in the garden bed unless I have pretty clear instructions on what to water and how long to water it.

No, I am speaking of a New Creation garden this morning. Our readings draw us to this idea of what a flourishing post-Easter life can look like, life that is given to us in Jesus and life that we are to carry to the world. Our calling is to be the gardeners in God's garden of new, resurrection life.

God has been commissioning gardeners since the beginning. Adam and Eve were doing the job well until they weren't, but even though the Garden of Eden is out of reach, God still calls gardeners.

Take Noah from our reading from Genesis this morning. The spiral of violence that was unleashed outside of God's good garden, that began with the children of Adam and Eve ending up a murder and his victim, has descended into utter chaos. Humanity is trying its best to de-create what God has created. And so God allows that destruction to rain down upon his creation, but not without preserving Noah and the animals on the ark. And I have to credit the folks at the Bible Project for putting this image to me, but think about the task that Noah is given by God: to build an ark and fill it with his family (humanity) and the animals (the rest of creation). Noah's instruction is essentially to create a micro version of Eden to shelter God's creation through the Flood so that things can start again. Noah is a gardener.<sup>1</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> See *The Bible Project Podcast*, episode "Commands for Life Given to Noah and Abraham."

That's what we do after Easter. We plant and cultivate Gardens. We form little pockets of Eden in a world that is flooded with the forces of death and destruction. God's people have been an oasis from the storms of the world throughout his relationship with them, even in times when they too would fall astray. The Tabernacle and Temple after it became places of refuge, places marked as little Edens in a world where the fullness of the Garden had been lost. Think about it, it is in the Tabernacle that Moses meets with God and in the Temple where the presence of God dwells, these are reflections of that daily walk God would take with Adam in Eve in the Garden of Eden. God loves to commission gardeners!

I do not think it is just a humorous misunderstanding that when Mary Magdalene doesn't realize she is talking to the resurrected Jesus outside of his tomb, she mistakes him for the gardener. How right she was! Here in the garden of the empty tomb, the way back to Eden had been opened! In the book of Revelation, when the heavenly city comes down and all is finally made right again, the vision clearly demonstrates that this city is a garden city. And so the Great Gardener commissions us, the Easter people, as junior gardeners of his New Creation.

But what is the fruit of this new creation? That fruit is life. What gives Noah the indication that the new phase of Creation is ready? An olive branch. New growth. What is the sign that the Resurrection kingdom has come into the world? Light and life wherever his people go. We are resurrection people. That means that we can go even into the darkest places with the hope that something new can grow. Consider the places where you have been called where the darkness of the world is evident. In this season of Easter, consider the ways in which you have been called to bring the light of the Resurrection to those places.

I am going to make a movie reference here that might be a bit unexpected. If you haven't seen *Paddington 2*, it is excellent. But I was thinking about this film, of course made for children, in light of Easter because it offers a beautiful picture of the Easter call to bring light to the darkness.

In the course of the action of the film, Paddington Bear is wrongfully convicted of theft and is sent to a cartoonishly harsh prison, filled with rough characters, the roughest of which is the inmate who has become the head chef, the one in charge of giving stomach-turning gruel to each prisoner everyday. Paddington, of course, gets assigned to kitchen duty and suffers the scorn of the hardened chef. But then through a combination of his naivete and good nature, Paddington takes the opportunity to do what only he can do, insert a tiny bit of joy in the darkness in the form of marmalade sandwiches. And slowly, what was a dark place gets a little lighter. The better food made with care causes the other prisoners to complete their tasks with more care. Frowns, even the one on the face of the hardened criminal chef, start to soften into smiles, and before you know it, what was once hell looks a little bit more like heaven. All because of marmalade.

We have much more to offer to the world than marmalade! The God of the universe, the Creator of all that is, desires that we could live with him and he sent his Son to die so that we could do that, but that death was not permanent and his defeat of the grave means that same resurrection life is available to us all who believe in him. That is the message we get to carry.

Being a priest, people will often tell me the nicest things about their experience of being in church. Ok sometimes we get complaints, too, but overall, there's a lot of positive. I will hear something like, "I am so happy to be at church where I can be myself." "I feel safe at church." And I think that is a wonderful thing. I have those feelings myself. The Church ought to be the well in the dry land where those who are thirsty receive the water they need. But the goodness we experience in God's presence is not meant to be kept here. We are to be irrigators of the dry land. We are to bring nourishment to the hungry and life to the tombs of this dead and weary land. Go forth and garden!

But let's not get too ahead of ourselves. Let us work with humility, understanding that it is not ultimately up to us to make things right, even while we work toward that goal. If you keep reading in the book of Genesis, you will find that Noah does indeed cultivate a garden. In fact, he plants a vineyard. And this vineyard is so successful that he gets drunk off of its produce. While he is sleeping off his stupor, his own son takes advantage of his weakness and the whole human story of cycles of sin and violence continues again. If it is up to us, we fail miserably.

But thankfully it is not up to us. The ultimate guarantor of God's promises is God, not us. He invites us to labor with him in his work, but it is his work that he brings to fruition. The sign of promise that God makes with Noah after the Flood, the rainbow, this is not a symbol Noah could muster himself. Noah couldn't explain that a rainbow was water droplets in the air separating light into its individual colors, so there was no way he was putting that thing up in the sky. "I will put *my* bow in the clouds," God says.

The floodwaters of the world are relentless. They will buffet us until our Lord returns or we die. And we won't always be up to the challenge. There will be space to bring grace in a situation and we will choose bitterness. There will be times we will choose self over the other. There will be times when we will not be guilty of any sin, but simply our strength will fail.

Thankfully, God's strength does not fail. In reflecting on the Ark, Walter Bruggeman writes: "The only thing the waters of chaos and death do not cut through is the commitment of God to creation."<sup>2</sup> The rainbow in clouds is a symbol of God's promise to keep those things at bay because of his regard and love for us.

Well that's all well and good, you may say. But there's one problem. Death. Noah died. Noah's children and grandchildren died. They may have survived the cataclysm of the Flood, but every human being from that time on has died in spite of that promise and many in great suffering.

As it happens, the rainbow was not God's last and greatest sign. No, his final word on the matter of human suffering was to come and take on a body capable of suffering himself and indeed to suffer himself. Jesus' suffering was not only in his body in terms of pain, but in his soul. Jesus lost loved ones. Jesus saw friends get sick. Jesus felt the pain of the heart that comes with betrayal. He is God's sign to us that God is not far off from us in our sufferings.

And with regards to death, that same body is the sign. Because after the crucifixion it did not stay dead. Even his own disciples were not expecting their Lord to rise again

---

<sup>2</sup> Bruggeman, Walter. *Genesis*. Interpretation Commentary Series, p. 85.

from the dead, but a week later, there he was, in the locked room with him, scars and all. The same God who causes rainbows to beautify the sky after a rain storm raised Jesus Christ from the dead. That is the sign to end all signs.

And this takes us back to the question we had at the beginning: "What now?" Well, first things first. The apostle Thomas, though he was late to the party, comes to the right conclusion as he encounters Jesus raised from the dead. He says, "My Lord and my God." That's the right way to respond to this sign to end all signs. And so if you have not come to the Lord today, that invitation is open to you. Come and receive the life that is offered to you! Be born again in baptism!

But what about those of us who are in the middle of the already and the not yet? We are walking with Jesus, but it feels like we're in the middle of a Flood. It feels like the world is coming down all around us. Well, I want us to look at what someone who was in that room with the resurrected Christ has to say about that.

Hear what Peter says in our New Testament lesson:

"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, who by God's power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. In this you rejoice..."

Here is a summary of the promises made to us in Christ and sealed in the sign of his resurrection. This is the "already" part of the equation. We who are in Christ have that imperishable inheritance. Peter preached passionately about this hope

throughout the rest of his life. And yet, he also encountered persecution, trials, and great pain. He continues:

“...though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, so that the tested genuineness of your faith—more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ. Though you have not seen him, you love him. Though you do not now see him, you believe in him and rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory, obtaining the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls.”

Peter tells us to hold on. To root our faith in our love for Jesus, even if we haven't seen what those who came before us saw with their own eyes.

When Noah was in the Ark, he had a time where he was asking “Now what?” He's there trapped in close proximity not only with his extended family, but all those animals, smells and all. If you thought COVID lockdown was bad, I am sure Noah would have been very happy to trade with you. Imagine this though, the rain stops falling outside the Ark, but it is still just water as far as the eye can see. Noah knows God has been proven to be right in all he has said thus far. I am sure Noah was glad he had listened and built the Ark. But now that question starts to sink in, “Now what?” Will God fulfill his promise? Will Noah be living out the rest of his days on this crowded boat? But notice what Noah does. It is a small thing, but it is full of faith. He sends out a bird, hoping it will return to him with a sign of dry land. Noah is looking for the fulfillment of God's promises. And crucially, when his first and second attempts come up empty, he doesn't quit. He sends out another one.

If you feel surrounded today, keep doing those small things that show you are still longing for God's resurrection life. If you are feeling discouraged today, let the joy of the Easter season be the oxygen that keeps you going. Rejoice in the sign to end all signs, the Resurrected Son. Glory to him, with the Father and the Holy Spirit, now and forever. Amen.