

A Sermon for Easter Sunday, Year B  
April 16, 2006 — Mark 16: 1–8  
Fr. Jim Cook

## *The Great Conspiracy.*

I can't believe how beautiful it is outside! The Redbud and Crab Apple are in bloom; the Tulips, Daffodils and Crocus are showing their face to the sun; Forsythia and Lilac are bursting with color and fragrance; and even this parish's two Dogwoods are standing proud with their pink and white cross-shaped flowers. It's a great time to be alive. (Even my yard at home is growing thicker and greener, and doing so faster than we can keep up with it.)

It doesn't seem possible that, even only a few weeks ago, the landscape looked dead and gloomy. In fact, you had to bend over really far, and look really closely, to even see the tops of the green sprouts pushing their way through the soil. Such a transformation, and such an abundance of new life seemed, back then, to be an improbability. And if you'd told me then, what I'd be looking at now, I'd have thought you were crazy.

When my family moved to this area, now almost twelve years ago, the house Peggy and I purchased was a fixer-upper; inside and out, it needed attention. Even the lawn was a shambles; the back yard was almost non-existent, due to the previous owner's several very large dogs. And the front yard had been entirely taken over by weeds. On the day we moved in, and our girls got to see their new home for the first time, what Peggy and I saw was a lot of work ahead of us. But what Laura saw (and she would have been almost five years old then) was a blanket of beautiful golden blooms, greeting us from the front yard. She rushed from the car and, with great joy, began to gather a bouquet to decorate our new home – a bouquet of Dandelions.

It may be true that beauty is in the eye of the beholder, but even so, the beauty of the plants and trees and bushes, that we can see around us right now, seems to be proof that all of creation is conspiring to send the same message: that, in the midst of a dead and colorless landscape, new life and transformation and hope are sometimes only a season away. And that, my friends, is this season's improbable message. (Given all this, it seems somehow appropriate that, in one gospel's Easter account, when the women came to the tomb, and first saw Jesus, they initially mistook him for a gardener.)

Equally improbable, is the reason we have all gathered here this morning. Jesus, who was dead on Friday, is somehow alive again. *How weird is that?*

In retrospect, however, just about everything to do with his life and ministry was just as improbable:

- His mother was a virgin.
- His birth was first announced to the lowly, and much-despised, shepherds.
- His first official visitors were three foreign dignitaries; *Outsiders?!*

- His first miracle was to (reluctantly) produce an inordinately large quantity of excellent wine, just so that a wedding reception could keep on rolling.
- His inner circle of followers included men who were uneducated, arrogant, loud-mouthed, and self-righteous.
- He seemed to prefer the company of prostitutes and sinners, and (but perhaps only in the eyes of his detractors) he developed a reputation for being a glutton and drunkard.
- He managed to offend nearly everyone of power or authority – whether religious authorities or civic leaders.
- And when the going got tough, his closest friends abandoned him, or (the recently released *Gospel of Judas* notwithstanding) betrayed him.

And yet, out of this seemingly desolate landscape, he spoke and taught with a power and authority that brought new life to some, transformation to others, and hope to us all. And even though he died the death of a criminal, by his rising to life again his ministry was vindicated, his teachings were proven, and the message he had been trying to get across to us all along was finally becoming clear: That “while we were still sinners, Christ died for us” (Romans 5:8). That is, even though we don’t deserve it, God loves us. And even though we’ve done nothing (and can do nothing) to earn it, we are promised a new life, and a new season of growth, transformation, and hope.

As such good news generally tends to be, many still find it hard to believe.

Several weeks ago, Peggy and I went shopping to replace our nearly-thirty-year-old stove. We shopped around quite a bit, and found what we were looking for at that huge furniture store by the speedway. But what we also found (but didn’t expect to find) in the “old floor models that are so nicked and scratched that we’ve slashed the prices just to get rid of them” section of the store, a complete master bedroom set. Naturally, we bought it and arranged for its delivery. On the drive home, Peggy was so excited by our good fortune that she called home to break the good news to our girls. Emily took the call and, after hearing everything that Peggy had to say, said (but only after a *very* long pause), “Is this some kind of sick joke?”

Who could blame her for doubting? It was the last thing she expected to hear coming from her mother’s mouth. And, for that matter, who can blame the disciples for not believing the women’s claims of an empty tomb; They’d seen Jesus die with their own eyes. And who can blame us, even after everything we’ve learned and been taught, for sometimes not believing that God loved us so much that he’d die for us?

It’s all so improbable, that God would love us so much that he gives us – *gives* us – new life, *and* a renewed relationship with him and each other right now, *and* an eternal life with him in heaven, all because ... well, just *because*. Just because he loves us.

I guess this is why I’m glad that things worked out the way they did, and Easter takes place in the Spring; when the Dogwood and Redbud are in bloom, when the Tulips and Daffodils are doing their dance of color, and when the Lilac is filling the world with wonderful smells.

Because Easter Sunday, and all the plants and trees and flowers – and everything else in all of creation – are conspiring together to remind us that

“God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. For God did *not* send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him” (John 3:16–17; emphasis mine).

So, the next time you’re tending your garden, or standing in the rosy shade of a Redbud, or bending to see all the colors of a Tulip, remember ... remember that we are the Easter people, who wait for transformation, who hope for eternal life, and who live always in the love of God.