

## Garden Work

### 4th Sunday of Easter, Year B – 1 John 3:16-24

*preached by the Rector at St. Paul's, Henderson, April 26, 2005*

Lord, take my eyes and see through them. Take my lips and speak through them. Take my soul and set it on fire with love for thee. Amen.

Alleluia! Christ is risen! The Lord is risen indeed! Alleluia!

For those of you that are part of the group that tries to figure out how in the world the preacher is going to connect his latest crazy story to the readings for the day, I will give you a clue ahead of time this morning by reminding you that I have committed myself to preaching from the Epistle readings this year, in the case of the Easter season, that means the reading from the First Letter of John. I'll even give you another hint before I get started this morning, by telling you that this week, I focused on verse 18 of this morning's reading from the third chapter of that book: "Little children, let us love, not in word or speech, but in truth and action." So, as they say, on with the show.

I have this really *cool* garden. Most of you know that Jenny and I have the little white house over here on the southwest corner of Center and Ingram. It's not a big house, and the lot it sits on is not very big, either, so the garden is pretty manageable. The lawn is mostly on the Ingram side, a tight, neatly manicured plot of turf grass – Kentucky 31 tall fescue, I think – under a pair of stately old maples, bounded at the south end by a large bed of perennials – daisies, coreopsis, azaleas, clematis, some iris and lily-of-the-valley, that sort of thing – set off from the drive by liriop, what most people in the south call "monkey grass."

There's not much room around back, but it's all put to efficient use. Into the tight area between the house and the shed, I've tucked a small patio with a bistro seating area and a kitchen herb cutting garden, and since it gets very limited sun, a beautiful assortment of hostas I've collected over the years. On the north side is my secret garden, separated from the front by a lychgate of sorts, and portioned into several small areas of interest, including a meditation spot at the back near an ancient antique rose that came with the place, a fountain whose bubbling water masks the noise of the neighborhood, a raised bed for starting annuals, and another for a couple of tomato plants and some peppers.

The garden at the front was once dominated by another large tree, and the former owners had built a raised bed and a semi-circular walkway to accommodate it. The bed that still contains a bit of the stump of the old friend now houses a beautiful dogwood, azaleas, peonies, and, in season, daffodils, tulips and lilies. The foundation at the porch is a mix of boxwood and lavender – the latter to keep away mosquitos – merging on the west end with a pair of mulched crepe myrtles.

Oh, and the little strip between the drive and the fence on the south side I use to start new plants and give a head start to cuttings and starts that I often get from friends' gardens, until I decide where they should go in my own.

Now, some of you have already *been* to my house, and some of you have at least driven by, so you already know that the best part about my wonderful lawn and garden... is that most of it... is in my head. I have sat for literally *hours*, pouring over ideas from catalogues and magazines and Facebook. And I have stood outside and imagined, like one of those shows on HGTV where the ideas come to into view as you're taking it all in. I know *exactly* what I want my lawn and garden to look like, as you can probably tell from my description a moment ago. The *problem* is, that me *thinking* about it does absolutely *nothing* to make it happen.

“Little children,” John says, “let us love, not in word or speech, but in truth and *action*.” Ahhhh! Is everyone with me *now*? You see, God planted a little garden of his own way back when. From the sound of the stories in Chapter 1 and 2 of everything, it was quite the place. But the main feature, was *us*. Formed of the dust, we were filled with the breath of God himself, and given the whole garden to tend and enjoy. We had, and *have*, only two tasks: (count it) Love God, and Love Each Other. It’s an easy task, we *know* that, if we’d *do* it. But from Chapter 4 when one decided he didn’t get the respect he felt his brother owed him... Sigh! “Little children,” John says, “let us love, not in word or speech, but in truth and *action*.” Is everyone *still* with me?

I am pretty sure that I have neither the time nor the resources, nor the permits, for that matter, to make my garden a reality. But here lately, I have been very busy trying to get it started. In the last few days I have lifted hundreds of bags of mulch and topsoil – well, at least a half dozen. I have pulled and pulled and pulled, chickweed from the circular bed out front, and maple seedlings from the starting bed out back, and dandelions and dandelions and dandelions from just about *every* place. I have mowed and mowed to make the grass grow stronger, and I have sprayed Weed-B-Gone to give the grass a fighting chance against the weeds that form the vast majority of my lawn – *for now*. And I have made one after another expensive trip to the garden center, and have planted small versions of the mature plantings I have in my head, including a beautiful, tall delphinium that I hurriedly staked out last evening before the storm – it seems to have made it through. Standing up here this morning, I am *sore*, my back from all that lifting and weeding and digging, my knee is sore from walking back and forth with the mower and the sprayer, and my hands... oh, *my*, will I *ever* get them clean!

Sometimes, if we’re going to do what we are supposed to do, if we’re going to do what we are commanded to do, if we’re going to do what we were created to do, we’ve got to work at it. Sometimes we’ve just got to tend the mature fruit of love deeply held and enjoyed. But *sometimes* we’ve got to plant small starts in places that may even seem unlikely to prosper. *Sometimes* we’ve got to work hard to get the weeds of distrust or prejudice or disdain or judgment out of the way, to give love even a *fighting* chance. *Usually* we have to mulch and aerate and cultivate with actions small and efforts large to make love grow. And we’re going to have to get our hands dirty, (count it) but that’s who we were always meant to be. That’s who we are as children of God.

“Little children,” John says, “let us love, not in word or speech, but in truth and *action*.” Is everyone with me *now*?

Alleluia! Christ is risen! The Lord is risen indeed! Alleluia!