



What Are We Doing Here?

Week 7 (Easter): Change

Brian Mattson - 04/05/2026

**God of herons and heartbreak,
teach us to love the world again,
Teach us to love extravagantly
knowing it may
(it will) break our hearts
and teach us that it is worth it.**

**God of pandemics and suffering ones,
teach us to love the world again.**

**God of loneliness and longing,
of bushfires and wilderness
of soup kitchens and border towns,
of snowfall and children,
teach us to love the world again.**

- A Prayer to Learn to Love the World Again, Sarah Bessey

I'm sure—absolutely positive—that Heather Blair is not a fortune teller. So as we were formalizing our plans in January for this Lent series on prayer, and she was digging into prayers that would connect with you all, there's no way she could've known that *this* prayer would resonate with *me*. It's a prayer about change. But it's not necessarily about one thing ending, and something

completely different taking its place. This is not like buying a new pair of socks because you saw your big toe sticking out. It's about a metamorphosis. A rebirth. We know that from the repeated use of the word *again*. Something old made new.

The God of everyone and everything is constantly renewing Creation.

So as I was getting started on my sermon this week, I re-read this prayer by Sarah Bessey, and was struck because of the first line—*God of herons and heartbreak*. Just this week, a pair of yellow-crowned night herons showed up in my backyard. *Maybe Heather can see the future?* This is the fourth year in a row they've made an appearance. This is an exciting event at the Mattson House. We unpack the telescope and watch them hunt for worms in the mornings and collect sticks for their new nest in the afternoons. It's the same routine every year, but it's always new. Different. The world has changed. We have changed. I'm sure the herons have changed too, though I haven't asked them for updates.

Change can be a good thing. Change can be necessary. Change is a requirement for Christians. It's one of the things that happens when we pray. It's one of the requests we make to God as we pray. Theologian and author Richard Foster says:

“To pray is to change. Prayer is the central avenue God uses to transform us. If we are unwilling to change, we will abandon prayer as a noticeable characteristic of our lives.”

- Richard Foster

We've spent the last six weeks exploring the practice of prayer. We looked at the Lord's Prayer as a model to use, but more importantly how Jesus was showing that prayer was at the very core of a life of faith. We explored our prayers of anger, despair, and grief through psalms of lament. We scaled down our prayers to simple words, like *help* and *thanks*, and looked at saying even fewer words by just being still and paying attention. Last week, I

discussed how our prayers of celebration and praise aren't relegated to times of joy, but in all phases of life, because existence is a gift. Today, as we celebrate resurrection, we pray for change. Or at the very least, that we can allow change to happen to *us*, because God is not going to stop reimagining, recreating, and renewing in this world. To ask God to quit would be like asking a gardener to stop growing plants.

God is the great gardener, and this creation—all the earth—is God's garden.

Scripture talks a lot about gardens and farming and cultivating. Jesus uses a lot of gardening metaphors. The story of Adam and Eve takes place in the Garden of Eden. At the end of the whole book, in Revelation, "a new heaven and a new earth" come down to Jerusalem, representing a restored Eden—God's garden. And the story of Jesus's resurrection occurs in a garden.

The final scripture reading at our Good Friday service was the burial of Jesus. His followers, Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus, took his body and prepared it for burial according to Jewish customs. Then in John 19, it says:

Now there was a garden in the place where he was crucified, and in the garden there was a new tomb in which no one had ever been laid. And so, because it was the Jewish day of Preparation and the tomb was nearby, they laid Jesus there.

- John 19:41-42

That's where we left Jesus. Just a few days before, he was riding into Jerusalem on the back of a donkey to the shouts of an adoring crowd. Now, he lies dead in a tomb in the wall of a garden. He doesn't stay there though. In fact, he's missing the next time we read about him.

Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene came to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the tomb.

- John 20:1

Mary is confused and assumes Jesus's body was stolen. She runs back to tell Peter and John and they come to investigate themselves. The tomb is empty, but Jesus's linen wrappings are still there. The cloth under his head was there. Not strewn about, but neatly placed. Strange things are afoot, it appears. The confused disciples return home leaving Mary alone at the garden tomb.

Mary stood weeping outside the tomb. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb, and she saw two angels in white sitting where the body of Jesus had been lying, one at the head and the other at the feet. They said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping?" She said to them, "They have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid him." When she had said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not know that it was Jesus. Jesus said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you looking for?" Supposing him to be the gardener, she said to him, "Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away."

- John 20:11-15

She thought he was the gardener. That makes sense, she was in a garden after all. It turns out it wasn't the gardener, but the resurrected Jesus. He calls her by name—*Mary!*—and she hears his voice and recognizes it, then runs to hug him. Jesus is the Good Shepherd who knows and calls his sheep by name, and she is one of those sheep who recognize his voice.

This emotional scene is a callback to some of Jesus's earlier teachings about returning again, about being a shepherd, about being a seed. Although it wasn't the gardener speaking to her, maybe it kinda was...?

You see, the writers of the gospels didn't waste words. This climax in the story of Jesus—the resurrection—happens in a garden after all. A subtle wink through the words on the page. Those first hearers of this story would've

recognized the setting. *Hey, didn't this whole story start in a garden? Yes, that's right, the Adam and Eve thing.* That first creation story took place in a garden where God gave humankind the ability and responsibility to care for and tend the garden—Creation. And now, God is ushering in a new creation. Renewing and transforming and regenerating us through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. A new community is forming. A new way of looking at the world. A new way of understanding life—one not defined or constrained by death. Like a grain of wheat, Jesus was buried in the ground, a seed sprouting forth from the dirt to give new life. The Apostle Paul recognized this defining aspect of the growing Christian community. In 2 Corinthians, he says:

So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; look, new things have come into being!
- 2 Corinthians 5:17

And in his final words at the conclusion of Revelation, John talked more about that new heaven and new earth coming from heaven. My study bible makes a poignant statement that “this world, God’s good creation, is not replaced but redeemed. God does not make ‘all new things’ but *all things new*.”

That’s what the resurrection is. A restoration of life. A redemption. A renewal. God continues to reimagine creation with the help of his shovels, and rakes, and shears. Me and you. Right here in this giant garden of God.

There are churches and pastors who will say that the good news of resurrection is the promise that you’ve been forgiven and someday, you too can leave this place. But I love what Rob Bell says about this. He says, “This is not a story about escape. This is a story about engagement.” The good news about resurrection is that you’ve been forgiven, so now you must forgive. You’ve been changed, renewed, now get busy tilling the soil. Raise up flowers and fruit, vegetables and vineyards.

Lord, renew me. Change me. Awaken me. God of herons and heartbreak, droughts and floods, farmers and gardeners—teach us to love the world again. And again. And again. Creation is groaning to be made new with the help of gardeners just like me and you.