

The Last Adam Stands in the Garden Again

John 20:1-18

Teacher's Guide

Introduction: A Return to the Garden

In April of 1945, American soldiers approached the gates of the Dachau concentration camp in Germany. For most of them, this was their first direct encounter with the horrors of the Holocaust. They entered a place built for suffering. Barracks were packed with starving prisoners. The ground was littered with the evidence of cruelty. Survivors later said it felt as if death had soaked into the soil itself. Soldiers who liberated the camp described the scene as overwhelming, silent, and lifeless. It was one of the darkest places they had ever stepped into.

But later that year, something unexpected happened. After the camp was emptied and abandoned, the land began to heal. When spring arrived, grass pushed up through the hard ground. Vines grew over the rusted fences. Wildflowers bloomed where death had ruled. Visitors said the contrast was almost unbelievable. A place designed for destruction was slowly being reclaimed by life. It was as if creation itself refused to remain under the weight of evil. Even in a place marked by death, life began to rise again.

Scripture tells a story like that. The Bible begins in a garden where God walked with His people, breathed life into the world, and blessed creation with beauty and order. It was there, among the trees of Eden, that humanity fell, sin entered, and death took root. The garden that once echoed with life became the starting point of the curse.

But that first garden is not the end; Scripture will close in another garden where the curse is gone and the tree of life stands again.

In John 20, after centuries of sorrow and expectation, the story returns to another garden. This garden holds a tomb. The ground is marked by death. Mary stands in the early morning darkness, believing that all hope has been crushed. Yet beneath her grief, something world-changing has already happened. Christ is risen. Life has broken through the curse. The Gardener has stepped back into His creation.

John includes these details intentionally. He wants us to feel the echo of Eden and to recognize the significance of the setting. The first Adam fell in a garden. The Last Adam rose in a garden. Redemption begins where rebellion began. Restoration blooms where the curse once reigned. Mary mistakes Jesus for the gardener, and in the deepest sense, she is right. He is tending the soil of new creation. He is planting resurrection life where death once held the ground.

John 20 invites us to step into this resurrection garden and witness the dawn of God's new world.

Opening Question

When have you seen God bring new life, new hope, or new direction in a place that once felt like loss or disappointment?

Possible Answers:

- A broken relationship God healed
- A season of grief where God brought unexpected joy
- A difficult failure God used to shape my faith
- A place where I thought everything was lost but God rebuilt

I. The Garden of Loss: Mary Meets the Silence of Death (vv. 1–10)

What's Going On Here?

1) The First Day of the Week and the First Hint of New Creation (v. 1)

John does not waste words. When he says, “on the first day of the week,” he is not merely giving the reader a calendar reference. He is inviting us to hear Genesis 1 behind the text. In the beginning, God spoke light into darkness. Now, on the first day of a new week, God is speaking resurrection light into the world's deepest darkness. Mary arrives at the tomb while it is still dark, but for John, the darkness is more than time of day. It is symbolic. It echoes the darkness of Genesis 1 before God created light. It echoes the darkness of Genesis 3 when humanity was driven from the garden. And it echoes the darkness of the human heart without Christ. Into this darkness, the Father has raised His Son. A new

creation dawn is breaking, even though Mary does not yet see it. John wants us to feel the weight: the resurrection is the first morning of God's new world.

2) The Tomb's Stone Removed: The Ending of the Curse Begins (v. 1)

Mary sees the stone removed from the entrance. This detail is loaded with biblical meaning. In Genesis 3, when Adam and Eve sinned, the way to the tree of life was barred. The entrance to eternal life was shut. Humanity was exiled from Eden, and death ruled every generation. The stone across Jesus' tomb functions like that barrier. It symbolizes the finality of death and the separation caused by sin. But now, in John 20, God rolls back the sign of the curse. The barrier is gone. The way to life is open. What Genesis closed, the resurrection opens. The stone moved is not merely evidence of an empty tomb. It is the declaration that the curse is reversing and creation is being restored through the risen Christ.

3) Mary Runs in Confusion: New Creation Begins in the Midst of Human Weakness (vv. 2–3)

Mary interprets the empty tomb through the lens of grief. She believes the body has been stolen. Her assumption is understandable, but it reveals something important. Resurrection does not wait for human understanding. God does not consult human clarity before He brings life from death. New creation begins while humanity is still confused, grieving, and blind to God's work. This is how God has always acted. In Genesis 1, God began creating before there was anyone to comprehend His work. In Exodus, God was delivering Israel even as they doubted His power. In the Gospels, Jesus often healed before anyone understood who He was. Mary's confusion is not a failure. It is the backdrop for God's sovereign action. New creation breaks in while human hearts are still stumbling in the dark.

4) Peter and John See Empty Grave Clothes: Evidence of Ordered Resurrection (vv. 6–7)

John slows down to describe the grave clothes carefully. They are not disrupted. They are not thrown aside. The face cloth is folded separately. This detail is not incidental. It shows purpose, intention, and authority. When Lazarus was raised, he came out still bound in his grave clothes. He had to be unwrapped because he was still in his mortal body. But Jesus leaves the wrappings behind. He does not need help. He passes through them. His resurrection is fundamentally different. It is not a resuscitation. It is transformation. The folded grave clothes testify that death has not taken Him. He has taken death captive. The

new creation body has stepped into the world. Order where chaos reigned. Life where death had claimed its grip. John wants us to see that the resurrection is not frantic. It is sovereign.

5) John Believes, Though He Does Not Understand (vv. 8–9)

John enters the tomb, sees the evidence, and believes. Yet the text says he did not yet understand the Scripture that Jesus must rise from the dead. This is a profound insight into the nature of faith. Belief often precedes full understanding. God does not wait for our theology to be complete before He reveals Himself. Faith grows in the soil of incomplete knowledge. John believes because he sees the work of God, even before he can explain it. This is consistent with the pattern of new creation. In Genesis 1, the light shines before the sun is made. In John 20, belief dawns before understanding fully breaks in. God's new creation often arrives ahead of our expectations and outpaces our comprehension. Faith begins with what God reveals, not with what we can explain.

Discussion Question

Why do you think God often begins His greatest work while we are still confused, grieving, or unable to see what He is doing?

Possible Answers:

- So that we learn to trust His power, not our understanding
- Because His work is not limited by our emotions or perspective
- To show that salvation is His initiative
- To reveal His glory in places we thought were hopeless

II. The Gardener Calls Her Name: The Last Adam Restores What the First Adam Lost (vv. 11–16)

What's Going On Here?

1) Mary Weeps at the Tomb: Creation Still Groans Under the Curse (vv. 11–13)

Mary stands outside the tomb weeping, and her tears carry the weight of more than her personal grief. They represent the burden of a world still groaning under the curse that

began in Eden. In Genesis 3, sin entered the world and death followed. Since that moment, humanity has lived east of Eden, separated from God and surrounded by sorrow. Mary's tears echo the lament of every heart that has buried someone they love. They reflect the longing Paul describes in Romans 8 where creation groans, waiting for redemption. Yet even as Mary weeps, heaven has already acted. Angels appear, not to comfort her sentimentally, but to signal that the curse is cracking. Her grief is real, but her grief is about to meet resurrection. The oldest wounds of the world are beginning to heal.

2) Jesus Stands Behind Her: The Presence She Seeks Is Closer Than She Realizes (v. 14)

Mary turns and sees Jesus but does not recognize Him. This moment reflects a deep theological reality. Ever since the fall, spiritual sight has been distorted. Adam and Eve hid from God when He walked in the garden. Israel trembled at His presence. The disciples often misunderstood Him even as they followed Him. Now Mary, standing only feet from the risen Lord, does not see Him for who He is until He reveals Himself. Resurrection life is present, but human eyes cannot grasp it without divine help. This mirrors the pattern of Scripture. God often stands closer than His people realize. He was near to Hagar in the wilderness, near to Elijah in the cave, near to the disciples on the stormy sea. Here in the resurrection garden, God stands before Mary even before she knows to look.

3) Mary Mistakes Him for the Gardener: A Deeper Truth Than She Realizes (v. 15)

Mary assumes Jesus is the gardener. In a beautiful way, she speaks more truth than she knows. The first Adam was placed in a garden to cultivate it, guard it, and fill the world with life. Instead, he allowed deception to take root. He failed to protect the garden. Through his disobedience, the ground was cursed and creation fell into futility. But now, the Last Adam stands in a garden at the dawn of a new creation. Where the first Adam brought death into the world, the risen Christ brings life from the tomb. He is indeed the Gardener. He is tending the soil of a restored creation. He is planting righteousness where sin once grew. Isaiah promised a day when deserts would bloom and creation would flourish again. That promise begins here. Resurrection is the first flower of the coming new world. Mary's mistake is a revelation. She mistakes Him for the gardener because He is the One who makes all things new.

4) Jesus Calls Her Name: New Creation Begins With Personal Revelation (v. 16)

Everything changes when Jesus calls Mary by name. One word from the risen Christ cuts through the fog of grief and opens Mary's eyes. This moment echoes John 10 where Jesus

says the shepherd calls His sheep by name and they know His voice. It also reaches back to Genesis. God created the world through His spoken word. He brought creation to life by calling light out of darkness. Now Jesus speaks again, and Mary steps into the light of new creation. Recognition does not come through sight or logic. It comes through divine initiative. Jesus reveals Himself. He awakens faith. He restores relationship. Only then does Mary cry out, “Rabboni,” recognizing Him not only as her teacher but as her Lord. Resurrection is not merely a doctrine. It is a Person who calls our name and brings us from death to life.

Discussion Question

Mary recognizes Jesus only when He calls her by name. What does this teach us about how God reveals Himself to us today?

Possible Answers:

- We know Him because He first knows us
- Salvation begins with God’s initiative
- God meets us personally, not merely conceptually
- He calls us out of confusion into relationship

III. Go and Tell: The First Witness of New Creation (vv. 17–18)

What’s Going On Here?

1) “Do Not Cling to Me”: Jesus Is Leading Her Into a New Kind of Relationship (v. 17)

Jesus tells Mary not to hold on to Him, and this moment is deeply theological. Mary reaches for the Jesus she knew before the cross. She wants the relationship restored exactly as it was. But Jesus is doing something greater. He is ascending to the Father, and His people will now know Him not by physical nearness but by the indwelling presence of the Spirit. In the Old Testament, God’s presence dwelled in the garden, then in the tabernacle, then in the temple. Now, because of Jesus’ resurrection and ascension, God will dwell in His people. Jesus is not distancing Himself from Mary. He is drawing her into a deeper intimacy than she has ever known. What she perceives as loss is actually gain. New creation brings a new way of knowing God, one grounded in resurrection power, divine adoption, and the Spirit who will make believers the temple of God.

2) “My Father and Your Father”: The Resurrection Creates a New Family (v. 17)

With one sentence, Jesus reveals the heart of the gospel. “My Father and your Father, My God and your God.” Before the cross, Jesus spoke of God as “My Father.” After the cross, He speaks of God as “your Father.” The relationship has changed. The barrier created in Eden has been removed. The hostility described in Genesis 3 has been healed. The resurrection does not merely prove Jesus’ identity. It secures ours. Believers are brought into the family of God, not as servants timidly approaching a king, but as sons and daughters welcomed by a Father. This is the language of adoption, reconciliation, and restored fellowship. Eden’s exile is being reversed. The family fractured by sin is being rebuilt through resurrection life. Jesus is the firstborn among many brothers and sisters, and Mary is hearing for the first time what this means. The garden that once witnessed the breakdown of family now witnesses its restoration.

3) Mary Becomes the First Witness of New Creation (v. 18)

When Mary runs to the disciples and declares, “I have seen the Lord,” she becomes the first herald of resurrection life. This moment is packed with redemptive irony and gospel beauty. In Genesis 3, a woman heard a lie that led humanity into death. In John 20, a woman hears the truth that leads humanity into life. The first conversation after the fall brought deception. The first conversation after the resurrection brings revelation. Grace rewrites the story. It is no accident that Jesus entrusts the first announcement of His victory to Mary Magdalene. The resurrected King commissions someone whose life had once been marked by bondage and grief. God delights in placing world-changing news in the mouths of people transformed by His mercy. Mary’s testimony becomes the seed of the church’s proclamation. In the garden of resurrection, the redeemed community begins with a witness.

Discussion Question

Why is it significant that Jesus commissions Mary to proclaim the resurrection, and how does her testimony shape our understanding of God’s grace?

Possible Answers:

- God uses ordinary people to carry extraordinary news
- Grace rewrites stories marked by brokenness
- Witness begins with encountering the risen Lord
- God honors those who seek Him even in sorrow

IV. The Garden-City to Come: The Resurrection Points Toward the Final Renewal (Rev. 21–22)

What's Going On Here?

1) The Resurrection Garden Is the Beginning, Not the End (John 20:15)

When Jesus rises in a garden, John is not merely reporting location. He is signaling that God has begun the work of new creation. The soil beneath Mary's feet is the first ground touched by the resurrected feet of the Last Adam. Just as Genesis 1 described the dawn of creation, John 20 describes the dawn of the restored one. Yet this moment is not the final garden Scripture describes. It is the seed. The resurrection is the planting of a world that will one day flourish into full renewal. The garden Mary mistakes Him for tending is the first plot of a creation-wide restoration that will culminate in the renewed heavens and renewed earth.

2) The Curse Begins to Unravel in the Resurrection (John 20:17)

Jesus declares that He is ascending to "My Father and your Father." This signals that the alienation introduced in Eden is being undone. The barrier placed at the garden's entrance in Genesis 3 has been breached by the One who conquered death. But the full undoing of the curse is still unfolding. Revelation 22 declares, "There will be no more curse." The resurrection garden is the beginning of that promise. The empty tomb is the first sign that the thorn-filled ground of Genesis will one day give way to a world where the tree of life stands again and healing flows through creation like a river.

3) The Final Garden-City Fulfills What the Resurrection Begins (Rev. 21:1–5)

John the apostle, who saw the risen Christ in the garden, later receives a vision of the world's final garden. He sees a new heaven and a new earth. He sees the holy city descending like a bride. He sees God dwelling with His people as He once did in Eden. He hears the voice that spoke creation into being now declaring, "I am making all things new." What began quietly on resurrection morning will one day fill the universe with the glory of God. The garden of John 20 expands into the garden-city of Revelation where life flourishes without death, light shines without darkness, and fellowship continues without fear. The Gardener Mary encountered is the same Lord who will complete the renewal of all things.

4) The Tree of Life Returns, Completing the Story Eden Began (Rev. 22:1–3)

Revelation ends with a river flowing from God's throne and the tree of life on both sides of it, bearing fruit in every season. This is the tree humanity lost access to in Genesis 3. But now it stands in the center of a restored creation. Its leaves bring healing to the nations that once scattered at Babel. Its fruit represents eternal life restored to the redeemed. The resurrection garden is the first hint of this final reality. The return of the tree of life is the fulfillment of everything Jesus accomplished in His life, death, and resurrection. The first Adam closed the way to the tree. The Last Adam opens it forever.

Discussion Question

How does seeing the resurrection garden as the beginning of the final garden-city deepen your understanding of what Christ accomplished for you?

Possible Answers:

- It reminds me that salvation is the start of a whole new world
- It shows that resurrection life is not only personal but cosmic
- It reveals that Jesus is restoring everything sin has broken
- It helps me live with hope, knowing where the story ends
- It connects my daily obedience to God's eternal plan

Living Out God's Grace Today

A. Bring Your Sorrows Into the Garden of Resurrection.

Mary came to the tomb in tears, convinced that death had spoken the final word. She carried the weight of grief that began in Eden, where sin first fractured creation and death entered the world. Many believers approach their own pain in the same way, assuming that sorrow and loss are permanent. But resurrection teaches us that no sorrow is final and no place of grief is beyond God's reach. The risen Christ meets His people in the very places where hope seems buried. He does not wait for strength or clarity. He enters our weakness. He speaks life where death has left its mark. In Scripture, God often draws near to the brokenhearted. He hears Hagar in the wilderness, comforts Elijah under the broom tree, and restores Peter after his denial. The garden of resurrection assures us that the places where we weep can become the places where Christ reveals Himself.

B. Let Jesus Name You Before You Name Yourself.

Mary did not know who Jesus was until He called her name. That moment reveals something essential about the Christian life. Our true identity is not found in our achievements, our failures, our wounds, or the labels others place on us. It is found in the voice of the risen Christ who calls us into new creation. Scripture tells us that God calls His people by name. He called Abraham out of Ur, Moses out of the burning bush, Samuel as a child, and Isaiah in the temple. Now Jesus calls Mary by name in the garden, signaling that resurrection creates a new identity for every believer. The world may name us by our past, our sins, or our scars, but Christ names us by His victory. Let His voice speak louder than shame. Let His word define you. New creation identity begins when Jesus calls your name.

C. Stop Building a Future on Your Own Strength.

The story of Babel shows what pride builds. The resurrection shows what God builds. Mary's first instinct was to cling to Jesus and hold on to the past, but Jesus invited her into a new way of living shaped by His power, not hers. Many of us build our lives on the strength of our own plans, abilities, and strategies. But resurrection life cannot be built by human effort. It rests on surrender, trust, and the power of the Spirit. Scripture warns us that unless the Lord builds the house, those who build it labor in vain. The resurrection calls us away from self-reliance and into God-reliance. Lay down the tower of your own making. Release the need to control outcomes. Let the risen Christ guide your steps. His power builds what your pride never could.

D. See Your Life as Part of God's New Creation Story.

The resurrection garden is not the end of the story. It is the beginning. Jesus rose not simply to defeat death but to begin renewing the world through His people. Paul says that if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away. The new has come. Every act of obedience, every word of grace, and every step of faith participates in the new creation God is bringing through the gospel. The Spirit who raised Jesus from the dead now lives in believers to produce fruit that reflects the life of Christ. Your ordinary faithfulness is part of a cosmic renewal that began the moment Jesus stepped out of the tomb. Live in that story. Walk as a citizen of the new world Christ is creating. Let your life bear witness that the Gardener is still at work.

Conclusion: The Gardener Has Begun Again

The story of Scripture begins in a garden, and in John 20 it begins again in one. The first Adam fell in Eden and brought sin, curse, and death into the world. The Last Adam rises in a garden tomb and brings life and new creation. Mary mistakes Him for the gardener, and in a profound way, she is right. The risen Christ is tending the soil of a restored world. He is

reversing the curse, planting resurrection life, and calling His people by name into renewed fellowship with God.

In this garden, the God who once breathed life into Adam now breathes hope into a grieving disciple. The One who walked with humanity before the fall now stands alive to restore what was lost. The resurrection is more than a victory over death. It is the dawn of God's new creation.

The first garden closed its gates behind us.

The resurrection garden opens its path before us.

The Gardener is alive, and He is beginning again.

Closing Prayer

Lord, thank You for the risen Christ who meets us in our grief, calls us by name, and brings new creation into the broken places of our lives. Teach us to trust His voice, walk in His power, and live as witnesses of His resurrection. Plant Your hope in us, and use our lives to bear fruit for Your kingdom. In Jesus' name, Amen.