

IN THE GARDEN

A SERMON FOR EASTER SUNDAY
MARCH 31, 2013
FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH
MARIANNA, FLORIDA
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JOHN 20:1-18

Most ministers and even a few church musicians that I know absolutely despise the hymn which provided the title for this morning's message and which we'll sing at the close of the sermon.

Some see it as poor theology. Some see it as sloppy and sentimental. It has even been the topic of jokes.

You know, like the little boy who says that he knows God's first name. "What is it?" his mother asks. "Andy!" the little guy responded. "How do you know God's first name is 'Andy'?" "You know, '*Andy walks with me, Andy talks with me...*'"

Well, "Andy" as the song has been called is always near the top of most favorite hymn lists.

You notice that it isn't in our hymnbook. It wasn't even in the old red hymnbook from the fifties. We had to "borrow" it from another source to use it this morning. Which says that for over fifty years, this old sentimental favorite has been "out of favor" with the folks who put together hymnbooks, even if it has been a favorite of those who sing hymns.

Well, I came to realize several years ago that it is a great hymn, a good hymn, but it is a hymn that should only be sung once a year.

We only sing Christmas hymns at Christmas, and we only funeral hymns at funerals and we only sing communion hymns at communion and we only sing Easter hymns at Easter. And that is what *In the Garden* is: it is an Easter hymn.

Most of us are old enough to remember the controversial Broadway musical by the late Andrew Lloyd Webber, *Jesus Christ Superstar*. I think I've still got the album on an eight track tape.

In that play, the actress playing Mary Magdalene had a hauntingly beautiful if troubling solo. Remember it? "I don't know how to love him, what to do, how to move him...He's a man, just a man, and I've known so many men before, in oh so many ways, he's just one more."

Of course, the point of the song and the point of the play was that Jesus wasn't just a man, but was indeed the superstar, the Messiah, the son of God.
I Don't Know How to Love Him was Mary Magdalene's song.

So is *In the Garden*.

Only Mary Magdalene can sing those words. She is the one who came to the garden alone, while the dew was still on the roses. And she is the one who heard the voice falling on her ear, calling her by name, that disclosed the Son of God. And He did indeed walk with her and talk with her and they did indeed share a joy there that none other had ever known.

And as the third verse says, she would have stayed in the garden with Him forever. But that isn't the message of Easter. That isn't the Good News of the Gospel. The news is too good to keep. Christ is Risen! He is risen indeed! Mary and all the others are to run from the garden, run from the upper room, run through the streets of Jerusalem proclaiming that good news.

Well, as you can tell from the story, they didn't do that. They didn't believe. They were afraid, they were timid, they were bashful, maybe even embarrassed. They didn't know how to tell people the good news.

They could have taken another old gospel tune and sung it in the streets if it had been written then.

"I serve a risen Savior, He's in the world today; I know that He is living, whatever men may say; I see His hand of mercy, I hear His voice of cheer, and just the time I need Him, He's always near.

He lives, He lives, Christ Jesus lives today! He walks with me and talks with me along life's narrow way. He lives, He lives, salvation to impart! You ask me how I know He lives? He lives within my heart."

And that could be our song today, instead of *In the Garden*.

We want to keep Jesus with us in the garden, in the quiet places of our lives where we feel close to Him. But the joy we share is to be shared, to be shared with all the world, until everyone knows the Son of God, until at the name of Jesus every knee shall bow and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord.

He is risen! Jesus Christ is risen today! Hallelujah, Amen!