

InSpire

Join Jesus, the divine gardener

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Rev. Jo’s April 21 Forum on early encounters with the risen Christ began with the moment when Jesus appeared to Mary Magdalene in a garden. (John 19:41 says that Joseph of Arimathea donated a garden tomb to Jesus.) The Gospel of John (20:15-17) recounts the moment when Mary Magdalene, upon discovering Christ’s tomb was empty, wept until Jesus addressed her:

He asked her, “Woman, why are you crying? Who is it you are looking for?” Thinking he was the gardener, she said, “Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have put him, and I will get him.” Jesus said to her, “Mary.” She turned toward him and cried out in Hebrew, “Rabbouni!” “[Teacher!]”

This moment marks Jesus first appearance after his resurrection.

So, what if I told you that Mary Magdalene’s mistake had a deeper, symbolic meaning? Jesus as the Divine Gardener is a metaphor for him gardening our souls. As a garden symbolizes renewal and rebirth, and portraying Jesus as a gardener adds another layer of the Divine Garden metaphor. Jesus became a divine gardener-just like God, who planted the Garden of Eden and was the first gardener, whose task is to restore humanity.

The Church of the Resurrection’s Memorial Garden is a living metaphor where we, like Mary Magdalene, can encounter the risen Christ. Now is a wonderful time to do just that. Late spring and early summer bring an explosion of color. The birds provide an extraordinary range of music. Three years of rigorous landscaping by an amazing array of gardeners has yielded a mature, rich garden. Benches, sturdy railings, and curated paths make the Memorial Garden safe and accessible.



Above: Robert’s path

Below: Hardscape and access



~ David Ewing



Jo Belser, our Rector

God, politics, and existential angst

Existential angst: a feeling of dread or panic when a person confronts the limitations of their existence.

I recently read a 2021 article by Kirk Waldroff for the American Psychological Association that posited that the root cause of our national political divide is our “existential angst” due to a profound sense of our utter insignificance. In other words, Waldroff says that many of us are deeply anxious because we feel hopeless to make life turn out the way we want it to. We reduce our anxiety, he says, when we try to get others to live in the way we think they should live.

Waldroff anchored his assessment in national census data in which one in every three adults in our country reported that they live in a state of high anxiety. One of the top reasons people gave for their anxiety was the political polarization in our country.

Waldroff’s proposed solution drew on the work of Kirk Schneider, a professor of psychology. Both Kirks suggested the best way to get beyond anxiety and political polarization is to form meaningful relationships with people who think differently than we do and converse about why we each hold the views that we hold *without trying to change the other*.

When I first read their proposed solution, I scoffed at the idea. Don’t we order our lives, by and large, so that we hang out with like-

minded people, people with similar anxieties? However, the more I thought about our national angst, the more I became convinced I had read something like this in scripture. And, with only a little bit of effort, I found this answer from the Book of Ecclesiastes in the apocrypha.

In case you haven’t read Ecclesiastes lately, it insists that all we do to try to make meaning and purpose in life apart from God is “hevel,” variously interpreted as “vanity” or “fleeting” or (my favorite) “vapor.” The author of Ecclesiastes tries to use the same things we use to give life meaning—work, money, power, and pleasures—only to discover they are all empty. In the end, he decides that the only way to live a meaningful life is to accept that all but God is hevel and enjoy life for its joys: existence, friendships, family, good meals, and sunny days. Because in the end, all that matters is that God is the one responsible banishing hevel and providing true meaning in life; our job is to “fear God” and live the way he tells us.

One of the things our Thursday Bible study group frequently reflects on is the meaning of “fearing God.” We have concluded that this doesn’t mean we should be afraid of God, but that we should respect God and give

our creator in the awe and worship he deserves.

One of the things I love most about our Church of the Resurrection is that we are an “anti-angst” community. We are very disparate people, drawn together by God to accomplish the things he gives us to do, principally to make him known in our little corner of his world. We hold all manner of differing political views—views that we rarely talk about in community for fear of tearing apart our unity. And yet, what better place to begin a one-on-one personal conversation with another to discover and respect their differing views? If this sounds too scary or difficult, you could practice on a family member or neighbor who you know who might hold differing political views than you. I’m guessing your mind won’t be changed, but whatever political angst you might have will be decreased.

~ Rev. Jo

Reflections on Lamentations

Last month, I was privileged to attend the memorial service for Joseph McCoy at Penny Hill Cemetery in Alexandria. Briefly, Mr. McCoy was an 18-year-old African American man accused of a crime and lynched by a mob on April 23, 1897. This is one of two documented lynchings in the City of Alexandria.

The memorial service included remarks by the mayor, the chief of police, a member of the McCoy family, and other dignitaries. But what I found most memorable about the event was the hauntingly beautiful music performed by a cellist as part of the service.

Let's be perfectly clear, what I know about music would fit in a thimble. But

several weeks late I'm still thinking about "Lamentations Black/Folk Song Suite." African American composer Coleridge-Taylor Perkins wrote this piece for a solo cellist in 1973. While it's a classical music piece, it has elements of the blues and Negro Spirituals.

A quick Internet search tells me that "lamentation" is from the Latin "lamenta" meaning weeping or wailing. This isn't a few tears rolling down your cheeks, this is sobbing with red eyes, a snotty nose, and ragged breathing. This isn't sadness, it's grief.

In this case, the grief is for a man who was denied justice and who died too young. Grief that angry African

Americans in 1973 were still fighting for equality. Grief that Alexandria and other parts of this country made a bargain with the devil to deny our history. Grief for the depressing amount of progress we've seen since the 13th amendment abolished slavery in 1865. Listen to "Lamentations Black/Folk Song Suite" and feel the grief. (The music is available on YouTube.)

But the denial, anger, bargaining, and depression of grief lead to acceptance. Once we have done the hard work of grieving, acceptance will let us move forward and provide accountability, reconciliation, honor, and respect to Mr. McCoy and all victims of racial injustice.

~ Coral Childs



Coral Childs

Tables in the nave?

We had tables into the nave during Holy Week, principally to facilitate our Good Friday meditation time and our Easter Vigil meal. What I discovered is that some of you were better able to deal juggling books and the like with the help of the tables. So I asked the Vestry if we could use a mix of table seating and regular chair seating in the nave for a limited amount of time on a trial basis. While not everyone is a fan of this plan, in true Resurrection style, the Vestry agreed to "try it" after Pentecost



The nave for our Easter Vigil meal service

Sunday (May 19) and see how it works for a couple of months. I encourage you to let me know whether it helps more than detracts from worship.

I know that many of you are planning trips beginning in mid-May, so don't be surprised on your return to see the furniture rearranged.

~ Rev. Jo

We have a congregation at The View

I have been told that there are more Episcopalians living at The View, a retirement community across North Beauregard Street, now that Goodwin Living owns it. A week after I arrived, Rev. Jo asked me to coordinate with the Rev. Kathy Howell, Chaplain for The View, to provide a monthly Episcopal Holy Eucharist service for the residents there. Rev. Kathy provides Methodist services on Sundays at 11:00 am but wanted a monthly Episcopal service. We agreed to provide a third-Sunday Eucharist service as long as we have enough priests to support it. The first service was on September 17, 2023, a week after my ordination to the priesthood.

The services have been well received, with about 25 residents in attendance. Even with my work as a supply priest in the Diocese of Virginia and Washington (DC), I have as yet missed only one service. The Rev. Liz Tomlinson (a retired priest) will provide our service there on May 19 when I will be officiating in Silver Spring, Maryland, and on June 16 (Shrine Mont Sunday).

The service at The View is similar to the previous 9:00 am service at Resurrection. To ensure the residents have time to get to lunch, the service is 43 minutes long. We sing only a few verses of hymns and use the Old



*Revs. Katherine and Jo at The View
on September 17, 2023*

Testament and Gospel lessons and the Psalm. The Celebrant preaches a short homily and there is an excellent pianist. The most challenging issue has been finding well-known Episcopal hymns in The View's *United Methodist Hymnal*. The residents have been very thankful to have this service available.

I asked one of the residents, Candace, to provide her thoughts about the services. She wrote:

“We have a group of Episcopalians here at The View Alexandria. Due to various reasons such as lack of mobility, coming from more distant locations before arriving here so not having a local church, and scheduling conflicts, leaving The View to attend Sunday services at an Episcopal Church isn't always possible. We are so

grateful to have The Rev. Katherine Ferguson come on the third Sunday of each month to offer The Holy Eucharist. She is so warm and engaging and relates well to our residents who attend. In speaking with several other residents who attend the services, we all agree about how important they are to us and what an excellent way she offers them.”

Candace frequently assists with the distribution of Holy Communion, and often is a lector. Others lead the Prayers of the People and some of the readings. A retired Bishop now lives at The View and he has been invited to take part by giving the final blessing. I give thanks to God for this ministry and invite you to join me there at 11:00 am on third Sundays.

~ Rev. Katherine

Time for rest, renewal, family and the holy

Yes, hard to believe; I have been privileged to serve at Church of the Resurrection since November 2020 and now I am grateful to be for time away in May and June.

I will miss all of you but spending time with my far-away children, grandchildren, and siblings is a priority. Moreover, my 93-year-old mother, a missionary in Brazil where I grew up, is moving back to America. Family meals, adventures, and shenanigans in France and a birthday celebration for my husband Sam are my anticipated joys ahead. My carrot cake and buttermilk pecan cake are on the menu and looking forward to introducing to my littlest grandson Forest his Nana's mini biscuits.

My paint brush needs to finish the last of 13 pictures



Rev. Susan's clan

to sell at a benefit for Lazarus ministry, and yes, there is a watercolor of our gorgeous blossoms in the Resurrection Memorial Garden!

Besides family and travel, I need some quiet time in my garden with God, planting red potato seedlings, snap peas, and heirloom

tomatoes, watching them grow is when I feel the presence of the holy.

May you all be well during these next weeks and know that each of you remain in my prayers as blessings from God.

~ Rev. Susan

We need you, please, on May 11

As a key member of Alexandria's community organizing group VOICE, Resurrection has been working to get the City to dedicate the additional \$10 million needed to move forward on redeveloping Community Lodgings' housing on Elbert Avenue. We were 13 of the 147 people that VOICE turned out on April 11 to get our mayoral candidates' support for this funding.

On May 3, the Alexandria City Council unanimously

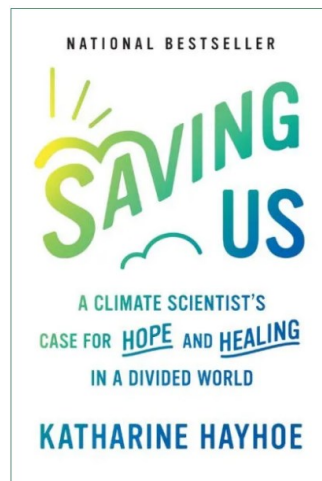
adopted a fiscal year (FY) 2025 operating budget of \$926.4 million, which represents a 4.8% increase from the FY2024 budget. The budget includes a one-time addition of \$3 million for approved, unfunded projects in the affordable housing pipeline. Plus, we expect that an additional \$3.6 million in this-year money made possible by the tax rate increase may be earmarked for affordable housing, so we are inching toward our \$10 million goal.

Here's the important part:

We need you, please, to attend the Alexandria City Council candidates forum that we are key hosts for at Third Baptist Church (917 Princess Street) on Saturday, May 11, regardless of where you live. Our church has a key stake in bringing our values to the public square in the city in which we worship. This event will be from 4:00 to 6:00 pm.

~ Rev. Jo

Katherine Hayhoe and a philosophy of hope



There are many issues concerning us and climate change is one of the greatest because it affects people worldwide. The food we eat, the places we live, our health, animals, and our pets. Katharine Hayhoe is an atmospheric scientist and a young woman who has committed her life to spread a message of hope. Many of her lectures are done on Zoom and when she travels by plane around the world, she will plan many meetings at one location because she knows that air travel is one of the most polluting for the atmosphere.

The two questions her audiences ask her most frequently are what gives her hope and how

can we talk to others about it? She will begin by asking people to give her words that describe their attitude about climate change and they will answer with words such as powerless, anxious, despairing, scared, despondent, depressed. When she finishes her talk, she will ask again and they respond that they are motivated, determined, and hopeful. What she is telling us is that the world needs a message of **hope**.

Rather than give Bible references about creation, Hayhoe will site verses about fear and hope. 2 Timothy 1:7a states, "For God has not given us a spirit of fear but of power..." (NKJV). Fear prevents people from acting but we can act out of concern and love for others. With that in mind, we are able to make sound decisions. Hope can start in single person, but a community can also take action. We need to believe that a better world is possible. Maybe the best thing we can do is talk about it.

What good things are being done in our communities? People are taking samples of water in our streams to monitor pollution, providing free trees,

and even helping to plant them. Some are keeping count of the birds that visit their backyard to determine where there is an increase of decline in population. Some are planting more native plants that attract pollinators and removing invasive plants like English ivy from their yards and trees. We are asked to let the leaves remain on our grass and flower beds to provide nesting places for valuable insects that provide food for birds.

There was an excellent article in the *Washington Post* on Thursday, April 25, by Michael Coren, Climate Coach, on cultivating habitats for bugs in our yards that tells how to attract and provide for many species. You may know of the benefits of lady bugs and bees, but do you know that many bees live underground? Coren's advice is to leave a bare patch somewhere in your yard where bees can find a home.

So, there is good news out there, we just have to look for it. Please listen to some of Hayhoe's lectures at www.KatharineHayhoe.com.

~ Judy Isaacs

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A diocesan prayer for truth, reparation, and healing

This prayer comes from the Diocesan Truth and Reparations Task Force for use in our personal and corporate prayers:

Gracious God, we pray for an understanding of the wrongs inflicted by the Episcopal Church in Virginia that promoted slavery and diminished the lives of the global majority. May we continue to embrace justice and repair, that all in your Beloved Community might thrive. Amen.

There was bouncing, pizza



On April 26, Affordable Housing and Communities, Inc. (AHC) hosted a Spring outdoor party for residents of The Spire and St. James Plaza. And Resurrection was invited, as well. Thank you to Maureen Bryant, Coral Childs, Betsy Faga, and Elta Wilson, who joined in the fun. The children and teens were thrilled with the moon bounce, inflatable basketball hoop, and corn hole. And all feasted on pizza and snacks. The sound of laughter and screams of delight filled the air.

Eclipses and our Creator God

As I stood outside Sherwood Hall Lane library where about 100 people had gathered and watched the recent eclipse my thoughts were immediately drawn to God's hand in creation.

While solar eclipses are natural astronomical events, given how God has ordered his Creation, they can serve as spiritual reminders of our Creator's power over creation. When we see the alignment of the sun, moon, and earth, it serves as a reminder of how intricate the cosmos made by God is. As I pondered this event I was struck by a sense of awe. As we marvel at beautiful sights like this, it has the potential to draw us closer to God.

While the Bible doesn't provide clear prophecies about solar eclipses, it does contain several references that are understood as referring to eclipses in both the Old and New Testaments.

Celestial bodies like the sun and moon can represent spiritual concepts in Scripture. The sun, with its life-giving light and warmth, has been a symbol of God's loving power since ancient times.

However, as I stood there watching I realized that it is important to approach the symbolic interpretation of solar eclipses with caution and humility. Recent headlines surrounding the eclipse had spoken about the rapture and other portents of the so-called "end times." While eclipses are major events that direct our thoughts to our Creator, they don't necessarily connect to specific Biblical prophecies. So, instead of fixating on certain interpretations, I believe that it's simply best to allow an eclipse to inspire us with wonder at God's creating hand.

Psalm 19:1 tells us "The heavens declare the glory of



*April 8 total solar eclipse
(NASA photo in the public domain)*

God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands." Experiencing a solar eclipse is an amazing thing with spiritual meaning that serves as an occasion to feel awe and an opportunity to thank God for His work in our lives.

~ Rev. Jon



Church of the Resurrection

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About InSpire

InSpire is the monthly newsletter of the Church of the Resurrection, describing the people of our congregation and our faith journey together. The following individuals contributed to this issue of *InSpire*:

- The Rev. Jo Belser
- Coral Childs
- David Ewing
- The Rev. Katherine Ferguson
- Lea Fowlie, editor
- Lenore Funkhouser, photos
- Judy Isaacs
- The Rev. Susan Lukens
- The Rev. Jon Scarffe
- Kat Turner

Church of the Resurrection serves the people in the Beauregard Corridor of the City of Alexandria, home to many recent immigrants. In April 2021, Resurrection completed an eight-year mission to provide 113 units of affordable housing to its community.

Resurrection continues to discern

We held Forums after each service on April 14, continuing congregational discernment about recognizing our church's 60th anniversary by giving away \$60,000. These discussions followed up on the congregation-wide conversation that occurred on Palm Sunday as we began to celebrate our anniversary.

These conversations revealed that Resurrection's heart for outreach giving continues and that its 60th Anniversary provides an appropriate opportunity to continue that tradition. There was also a strong sense that Resurrection's role in giving should not be merely to "write checks;" we should be seeking a relationship with the organizations or individuals who are recipients. Therefore, it seems to make sense to use our Anniversary Outreach Giving to recognize and strengthen the strong bonds we already have with organizations in our community that provide services to our neediest neighbors.

Given this input, the Beatitudes Committee has determined which of our ongoing outreach partners they will recommend for Anniversary Outreach giving to the Vestry at its

May 21 meeting: Christ Church's West End Lazarus Ministry (\$22K), ALIVE! (\$20K), and the Scholarship Fund of Alexandria (\$18K, with \$8K of that earmarked for the Community Remembrance Project's Memorial Scholarships).

With respect to the larger goal of using our invested funds for outreach, the April 14 conversations revealed the need for further discernment to determine the directions Resurrection should take. There was a desire to preserve funds for the future operations of the church, including future capital improvements and repairs. This is rightly a Vestry responsibility, so the Beatitudes Committee is looking for Vestry guidance on the amount that would then be available for this goal. Likewise, suggestions for "Seeds for the Future" to ensure continued congregational growth and leadership development will be taken up by the Vestry.

The Beatitudes Committee needs to wrestle with and seek additional congregational input on questions about the amount of invested funds to be used for outreach giving, whether funds will be distributed at once or over time, the balance between traditional partners and new recipients,

and the extent to which Resurrection has the energy and expertise to push the bounds of our traditional outreach giving to forge new partnerships.

Perhaps there is another way to think about this additional giving. Probably everyone in the congregation has a pet project or two which they might like to include in this giving to supplement the individual donations that they make to these organizations. But think back to 2013 when we last engaged in a discernment process about Resurrection's future. We discovered that we had a passion for something new, something bold, and something that became unifying for us: building The Spire to provide affordable housing for 113 new families. Instead of looking for organizations to send some of our money to, is there a new mission for our church's future that can be as transformative for both us and our community? More discernment to come! Keep thinking. Keep praying. Be kind to each other.

~ Kat Turner