

“The Beautiful Truth of Spring”  
April 26, 2020

Romans 8:18-25  
Matthew 6:25-34

We are in a time of two crises: the current pandemic and the ongoing crisis of climate change. Anxiety and worry are constant companions for many.

Resurrection tells us to look at the beautiful truth of spring.

Hear that again in these troubling times: Resurrection tells us to look at the beautiful truth of spring.

Some of us have been doing just that.

Maybe you have as well.

I was talking with a church member recently about these strange days and the small occasions of goodness we find in them. She said that was surprising to *miss* going to the grocery store. Then she added that she found moments of joy during the week when she would see a bluebird while walking. “It’s kind of strange when the big event of my day is seeing a bluebird when I walk in Oakdale Cemetery,” she said. She also told me there is a beautiful field of bluebells at Oakdale, in case you are looking for a destination for your own walk.

Another member told of a walk during which the only other creature she encountered was a goose. “We had a good talk,” she added.

In recent weeks I’ve had similar moments in which nature has brought brief, unexpected happiness into my life.

Daffodil leaves have sprouted in our side yard every spring since we moved here—lots of long green leaves, but never any actual flowers. A couple of weeks ago, however, I looked and there were the daffodils—golden flowers, “tossing their heads in sprightly dance,” as the poet says.

Last summer I cut my overgrown forsythia bushes down to the ground. A few shoots grew back. And this spring they are filled with their own golden flowers that also had been absent in recent years.

These small occasions of spring beauty have given me hope for the irises that I got from another church member through our Share the Harvest program a few years ago. I planted them. Again, the leaves have come up—yet no flowers. But I have hope.

Outside the front doors of our church building as well, the daffodils have blossomed once more, as they do each year. And each year when I see them, I remember that wonderful Easter hymn, “Now the Green Blade Rises”:

Love lives again, that with the dead has been,

Love is come again like wheat that rises green.

Last Wednesday we marked the fiftieth anniversary of Earth Day. Today we bring “Earth Week” to a close. And as with all such observances in these days, we do so individually and without a lot of hoopla.

That’s OK.

In the midst of this pandemic, we are considering this Earth, our home, in fresh ways.

In our congregation, we think a lot about our responsibility to care for the Earth—and we act on what we think.

Today, however, let us consider the ways in which the Earth cares for us, bringing us joy through bluebirds and geese; offering us hope in flowers; speaking to us of renewal as lawns turn green once again.

Look.

Look so that you really see.

Look. Look at the land, the sky, the water.

Look at the birds of the air and the newly flowering plants all around us.

You might have seen the pictures of what is happening as people around the world stay indoors: the animals are taking to the streets—deer in Japan, macaques in Indonesia, goats in Wales.

Look!

And while we’re at it, let us listen as well. Let hearing be a joy to our ears. As Paul Tillich once encouraged us: “Listen to nature in quietness, and you will find its heart.”<sup>i</sup>

Our actions to protect this planet are important—we know that and that’s one reason we’ve found our way into the United Church of Christ. But our actions can become grimly earnest and our energy can be depleted.

Right now, simply look. Simply listen.

And in doing so, take delight in creation once more. Search the heavens, gaze at the earth. Stand in awe of all that you see and feel and smell. Let this world sustain you.

Resurrection tells us to look at the beautiful truth of spring.

Spring is something of a holy symbol, a visual sign each year of an ultimate reality: that life does conquer death; that our wintry hearts can thaw; that God can bring something new out of barren circumstances. Stop and look and listen—even now the trees and ground are telling the good news of God’s “Yes” to all creation.

In these days that can often seem dark, in these days when we can at times feel cut off from all that is good, in these days when we wonder what this world is coming to, the strong Mother God seeks to comfort us, her children, through Creation.

Receive that comfort.

You who care for the earth—let the earth care for you.

The poet, Wendell Berry, put it so well:

When despair for the world grows in me  
and I wake in the night at the least sound  
in fear of what my life and my children's lives may be,  
I go and lie down where the wood drake  
rests in his beauty on the water, and the great heron feeds.  
I come into the peace of wild things  
who do not tax their lives with forethought  
of grief. I come into the presence of still water.  
And I feel above me the day-blind stars  
waiting with their light. For a time  
I rest in the grace of the world, and am free.

Resting “in the grace of the world,” we can hear Jesus’ call to follow him in a non-anxious way.

Yes, we know all the reasons why this seems such unrealistic advice—especially now. Family, work, finances, school, health—choose any or all of those anxieties!

Listening carefully to what Jesus says, you start to get the sense that the call to trust in God’s good care still involves us in the possibilities and opportunities of life in all its difficulties; trust calls us to responsible caring for all that is entrusted to us and for all those whom we love. Jesus speaks to people who sow and reap and store, people who toil and spin—that is to people like you and me.

So when Jesus urges us to consider the birds of the air and the lilies of the field, he is asking us to do just that—consider. We are not called to become flowers or animals, but to *take into account* God’s providential care for all creation as we face all that worries and perplexes us as we live our very human lives.

From these words of Jesus we begin to develop a deep awareness that, to an extent most people in the world cannot imagine, we do not need to worry about what we will eat, what we will drink, or what we will wear. All these things *have* been given to us.

Jesus had a deep and abiding sense of the loving care of God—and commended that trust to his followers. This is living in the midst of tragedy and trial with the awareness of both the good that is available to us and the good that we can do.

This is living with the awareness that there is a power at loose in the world that is greater than our anxious worry. If we want to use religious language, we would call that power of the Resurrection.

So while our celebration of Easter is connected to the spring, and while I do strongly encourage you to consider the beautiful truth of spring, ultimately it is not spring that we announce in the church. We proclaim the power of the Resurrection and we do this every Sunday of the year.

Easter speaks to us of something greater than spring. It tells us something we *want* to hear, something we *need* to hear, because it speaks to us as adults who know the weariness, the pain, the profound loneliness, the confusion, and the fear of living. As one person put it: “In the midst of our desolation, we find the risen Christ, triumphant over death and still shockingly alive, present to us in ways we cannot understand much less explain. In Christ we find vibrancy of life and a firm compassion that does not deny our suffering but transforms and illumines it.”<sup>ii</sup>

Resurrection invites us to look beyond the beauty of spring.

In these days of great uncertainty and great adversity, when God often seems silent or absent, God is still at work in the world and in our lives. In a world that moves toward death and despair, resurrection turns us once more in the direction of life and hope. Faith in the God revealed through Jesus Christ leads us to hope and to act for the good in all the adversity of life.

Take a few minutes today—and if you can, take a few minutes *each* day to rest, to rest in the care, the love, and the strength of God.

You can do that.

You can do that for a few minutes.

The world and all its troubles will wait while you rest, while you are comforted.

And from that place of rest, out of that deep consideration, rise and greet the new day with all of its worry and challenges in peace, in strength, in hope.

After we have looked and listened, after we have touched and smelled and tasted—that is, after we have again opened ourselves to the wonder of God’s creation, perhaps we will be ready to once again take on our God-given role of stewards of creation, caretakers of the earth, our home.

Look at the beautiful truth of spring—and then to look beyond it to something greater: the power of the Resurrection.

Let us find strength in all that God gives to us through this earth, our home.

And out of this strength, may we find new ways to care for creation.

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<sup>i</sup> Paul Tillich, “Nature, Too, Longs for a Lost Good, *The Shaking of the Foundations.*”, pg. 86.

<sup>ii</sup> <http://www.beliefnet.com/Faiths/Christianity/2001/04/Easter-Changes-Everything.aspx>