

Sermon It Might As Well Be Spring
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It's been Spring for ten hours. What is the first sign of spring for you? Besides green grass and bursting buds and singing birds? Besides the bus carrying the Red Sox to Florida? For me it's mud. The smell of mud. The healthy stuff, mind you, not the sickly stuff left over from flooding where water was never meant to go. But spring mud. Opening the door in the predawn light to grab the newspaper and the air doesn't have such a bite to it and it's filled with the scent of mud. There's different mud, you know; mud on land and mud on the shore.

Those of us who have lived on the ocean know about the spring tide. (It has nothing to do with the season, by-the-way, think of "springing forth.") Spring tide happens at the full moon and the new moon when earth's tides are pulled to their highest and lowest levels. At certain times in certain years, these tides can be extreme. The cove I visited most of my life would be completely exposed; a square mile of ancient mud and rock open to the sun and air and curious children. When I thought of the Israelites fleeing Pharaoh's chariots, I'd remember that black mud clinging to my legs and believe the story completely. There was a delicious horror in the notion that, if I didn't get a move on, the water would return and cover me with fifteen feet of darkness. What can I say, kids like to scare themselves.

I think of seasons as messengers.

Summer says: kick up your heels and enjoy; you've got all the time in the world, use it to embrace the heck out of life. Work hard in the heat and do it with a will knowing there's a cool drink and good company at the end of the day.

Autumn says: dig deep in your soul and appreciate the world, reconcile with the ones you love, create beauty with your last breath.

Winter says: We're all dying a little. It's alright. Knowing it is all part of the grandeur of existence. Rest, let go, believe in peace.

Spring says: You're not dead yet, so don't act like it. And what's more, there's a surprise waiting for you.

Spring has this liminal quality; this sense of something just about to happen underneath everything. What's that line from the Secret Garden song: "when a thing is wick it has a life about it." ("Wick" from The Secret Garden musical, music by Lucy Simon, lyrics by Marsha Norman) Scrape away the skin of the branch and there's a little bit of green. Scrape away the crusty skin of winter and there's a little bit of the future. What do we want it to be?

Spring is not my favorite messenger. There is that expectation, maybe even hope, just waiting there, always waiting there, interfering with my hibernation. What are we supposed to do with it?

Jane Rzepka captured some of this in her meditation, "Palm Sunday:" "This is what we get in life: We want and want and want – undying love, a world that is fair, eternal life for ourselves and those we care about – and we can't ever have them. We are faced always with a savior dead and gone and an empty tomb to prove it." (A Small Heaven: a Meditation Manual, Boston : Skinner House, © 1989, p.3)

But Spring demands hope. That liminal quality of something about to happen wants us to be ready for it. It wants us to lay palm fronds in the streets. It wants us to paint our lintels red with the blood of the lamb and know the angel of death will pass over us. It wants us to open our doors and fly on our heavy

feet to freedom. It wants us to feel gravity sprinkling upward and rain rising. Argh! Spring says: want miracles!

Spring says want. It says be willing to wake up, throw open the door and throw ourselves open to the possibilities of what we might find there. We spend so much of our lives accepting gravity; accepting our limitations. Our souls need comforting, said Mary Oliver. Think of the ways you get down on yourself. Oh, I'm lousy at this, or I'll embarrass myself if I try to do that. So-and-so will laugh/criticize/weep with disappointment. This is the way we keep ourselves from accepting our possibilities. We get mired in mud instead of playing in it.

Okay, Spring tells us, there are some things you'll never be able to do, never be able to have. You'll want and want and want. But there's a whole world of things you can try. Stop worrying about disappointing others. There is a whole world of mercy out there. Let go of the burden of someone else's disappointment, says Spring and open yourself to mercy. Open yourself to wanting more; more than what others will give you, more than you give yourself. Open yourself to celebrating your imperfection. Open yourself to the ordinary abounding blessings – mud pies and daffodils and the crack of the bat and laughing so hard you fall off your chair. Open yourself to *being* a blessing.

What we do to others can matter more than what we do to ourselves. We can impose gravity on others. We can impose limitations on others. We can prevent others from experiencing their possibilities. Think about all the ways we do this. I was telling a story the other day about my teaching days and a student with dyslexia. I thought I knew everything, every strategy, but nothing worked. Then one day we had the class sit on the floor of the gym and draw the United States on poster paper. Most of the posters had what you'd expect: the continental U.S. spread wide, with a gigantic leg sticking out for Florida. I looked over my student's shoulder and was stunned to see a view of the United States the way it might look from space; each aspect in careful proportion to the other. He was so talented he took my breath away. I was ashamed of the way I had put him in a box and labeled him.

I remembered, when he's grown, he won't have to read and write as much to get ahead. I should have known better, me who consulted for the blind and visually impaired. We have the Kurzweil Reading Machine. We have text to speech synthesizers, and speech to text. He doesn't have to write – he'll be able to dictate into his computer and scan his text and listen to books.

I had been seeing him as someone who couldn't – as if what he couldn't do mattered more than what he could do. I wasn't listening to what Spring tells me, create possibilities – that's what you're supposed to do, create possibilities – instead of labels. It made me see him, and see myself, in a whole different light – better for him, challenging for me. He had been blessed with such a gift, and I had been blind to the blessing.

Spring is all about creating possibilities and accepting the blessings around us and in us. When you think about it, creating possibilities for others is actually what we do here. That is what a church is – a place where we create possibilities for ourselves and for others.

A place where we can create wholeness where there is injury.
A place where we can create purpose where there is loss.
A place where we can create connections, to work, to sing, to shout.
Where we can create order out of chaos and chaos where there is too much order.

So, what do you want to create? Because it might as well be spring.