

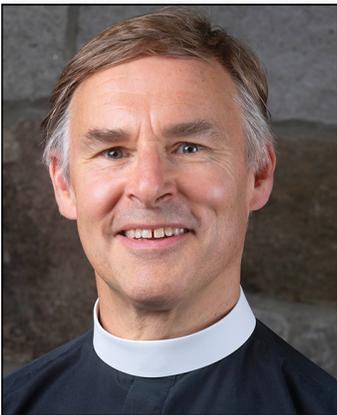
THE CALL

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Signs of Spring, Turning Toward New Life

New Life When Least Expected



The Rev. Adrian Robbins-Cole

THE THEME OF THIS EDITION OF *The Call* is "Signs of Spring, Turning Toward New Life."

I would like to start with a personal story about a surprising encounter with God which came out of a winter-like experience in my life.

When I was a little boy at boarding school in England, we had a new teacher from South Africa, named Mr. Price, join the staff. It amused us all enormously to see Mr. Price's excitement when he saw snow for the first time—he was like a little boy himself. But I equally remember his amazement about the way buds and blooms would reappear in spring after the long gray, dull English winter when the trees were so bare and appeared to be dead. We learned that the seasons did not change so dramatically in the Cape Province in South Africa where he came from.

When I have considered some of my deepest experiences of closeness to God, I have often thought of Mr. Price's surprise and wonderment

about how, out of the seeming lifelessness of the winter English countryside, a profusion of new life could emerge. Several of my most profound encounters with the divine have occurred in the most unpromising, if not seemingly life-denying situations. I suppose the central story of our faith, Christ's resurrection at Easter, following his death on the cross on Good Friday should not make me surprised about this. And yet, my own experiences have left me surprised, but also deeply hopeful. I would like to share briefly one of these experiences with you in this article.

Shortly after becoming the rector at St. Andrew's, I became aware of a lump growing on my neck. I was rather concerned about this, particularly because one of my grandmothers had died of cancer in her neck. I was sent by my primary care doctor to a specialist and then, over the course of several months, I found myself being bounced around between specialists at different hospitals and having all kinds of scans. I felt like a ball being knocked about in a pinball machine and I grew increasingly worried as no one seemed to know what this lump was. During this experience I did not feel God's presence with me at all—quite the opposite.

And then one morning, standing in my office at the church I said to myself, I must let go of all this worry and resign myself to whatever is going to happen. And so, figuratively, I imagined myself just leaning back to the arms of the unknown future. At that moment I did not feel the warm

reassuring arms of Jesus catch me and lift me up. Rather, I felt myself leaning back into a swirling black hole of darkness and nothingness. And yet paradoxically at this moment of complete surrender to nothingness, I had the most profound experience of God. Looking back on it, I suppose this is what the great Christian mystics call the "via negativa" or an "apophatic" experience of the divine. Or in other words, an experience of God who is beyond all human conception in the very experience of nothingness.

For me this was an experience of new life emerging out of the most negative experience. And it gave me a new insight to what faith in God means. It means giving oneself over to God without any holding back of the need to control or understand. It is "the leap of faith" into the unknown spoken about by the Danish Christian philosopher Søren Kierkegaard. I now realize that the Old and New Testaments of the Bible are replete with such stories beginning with God's call to Abraham that he would be the father of many nations despite all his circumstances pointing in the opposite direction. Christian history, too, is littered with the stories of men and women who have had these moments of finding the new life of faith in the most unpromising of circumstances when they have basically given up. For example, St. Francis as a prisoner of war, St. Ignatius as he languished in hospital for months after being wounded as a soldier, or Julian of Norwich during her sickness. Not only that, during Lent we are reminded that Jesus

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himself entered the wilderness, a place devoid of the signs of life, to eradicate the temptations from his life which would have prevented him from living into God's calling to him. From that experience of the wilderness, he emerged to proclaim a Gospel of new life and new hope for the world.

And I suppose my hope in writing this piece is that we might have

the faith to know that God resides in some of the most seemingly dead seasons of our life and that new hope and new life can come to us when we least expect it.

Yours in Christ,



Warden's Letter

New Beginnings at St. Andrew's



Ginny Snow, warden

GREEN SHOOTS PUSHING UP from the earth, morning birdsong, longer days, blooming flowers, open windows, and the promise of rebirth—these are some of the things that come to mind when I think of spring and Easter. It is a season of renewal, a time when new life feels especially close.

See, I am doing a new thing! Now it springs up; do you not perceive it? (Isaiah 43:19)

This spring, important new beginnings are happening at St. Andrew's as well.

Our beloved parish administrator, Kate Clark, is retiring after 17 years of faithful service. Kate's steady presence, wisdom, and care have shaped the life of this parish in countless ways, and her impact will be felt long after her departure.

At the same time, we are delighted to welcome Oliver Simpson as our new parish administrator. Oliver brings fresh perspective, new processes, and a wonderful energy to the office hallway. If you have not yet met him, please stop by his office and introduce yourself.

Similarly, we will be saying goodbye to our wonderful music director, Wardie Mannix, in June. Wardie's 19 years of dedication to our music program have left an enduring legacy. Her exceptional leadership has helped define who we are as a parish, and we are deeply grateful for the time and thoughtful effort she's given to St. Andrew's. A new music director will begin in June, bringing a new style, a different approach, and new strengths to our shared worship.

This spring also marks the formation of St. Andrew's property planning committee. This committee will work over the next year to develop a 10-year plan for capital improvements to our property. During this process, there will be a couple of open forums to engage the parish and welcome your input.

Spiritual growth, like spring, is a process of constant renewal. This spring, may we remain open to the ways God is at work among us—bringing fresh life, new beginnings, and hope for what lies ahead.



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The Alchemy of Grace



The Rev. Margaret K. Schwarzer

*All that is gold does not glitter,
Not all those who wander are lost;
The old that is strong does not wither,
Deep roots are not reached by the
frost.
From the ashes a fire shall be woken,
A light from the shadows shall
spring;
Renewed shall be the blade that was
broken,
The crownless again shall be king.*

READ THIS POEM THIS YEAR because it was in an anthology which was given to me as a Christmas present, but I recognized it immediately because I am a big *Lord of the Rings* fan. J.R.R.

Tolkien's seminal work of the struggle between goodness and evil was brought back into popular culture in the early years of our current century by director Peter Jackson. His first film, *The Fellowship of the Ring* debuted in 2001. This poem appears twice in *The Lord of the Rings*, and the last four lines appear in the film.

In the story, the poem speaks of the return of Aragorn, a protagonist who appears to be a homeless warrior for hire when we meet him but is later revealed to be the true king. Like David in our holy scriptures, the lowly shepherd who becomes the King of Israel, Aragorn is more than he appears to be.

In the story of David, an ancient ancestor of Jesus, only God can see who David will become. David gets overlooked because of his tall and handsome brothers—seven of them—until David's time arrives and he is revealed to be the one God has chosen to lead Israel. The least becomes the most important. The overlooked becomes the agent who brings vibrant new life to Israel.

As we look for signs of new life in our world and in ourselves, this poem insists we remember that places of stillness, weariness, even brokenness can be the sources of new life. New fire comes from cold

ash (with a live coal hidden underneath), those who are old may still be vibrant, potent, powerful; what is broken may be renewed and made stronger because of the testing or breaking. And, of course, true gold—what is truly valuable—doesn't always glitter and attract our attention right away. Just as what glitters, and looks so compelling and shiny on the exterior, is not always true or valuable when we examine it more carefully. New life may come when we least expect it, out of a place we underestimate.

Tolkien insists that the blade that was broken—shattered—can be renewed and that the one who was crownless for a long time can still wear the crown, becoming king when it matters most. Tolkien's story echoes our Christian story, the story of Jesus, who was shattered for our sake and renewed by the mystery and majesty of God. Jesus becomes "King of Kings"—forever healing, inspiring, leading his people in the Kingdom of God—the kingdom which matters the most. God isn't finished with any of us, yet.

My prayer for each of us this spring is that we may find new life, renewal, and refreshment in the places we need it the most.

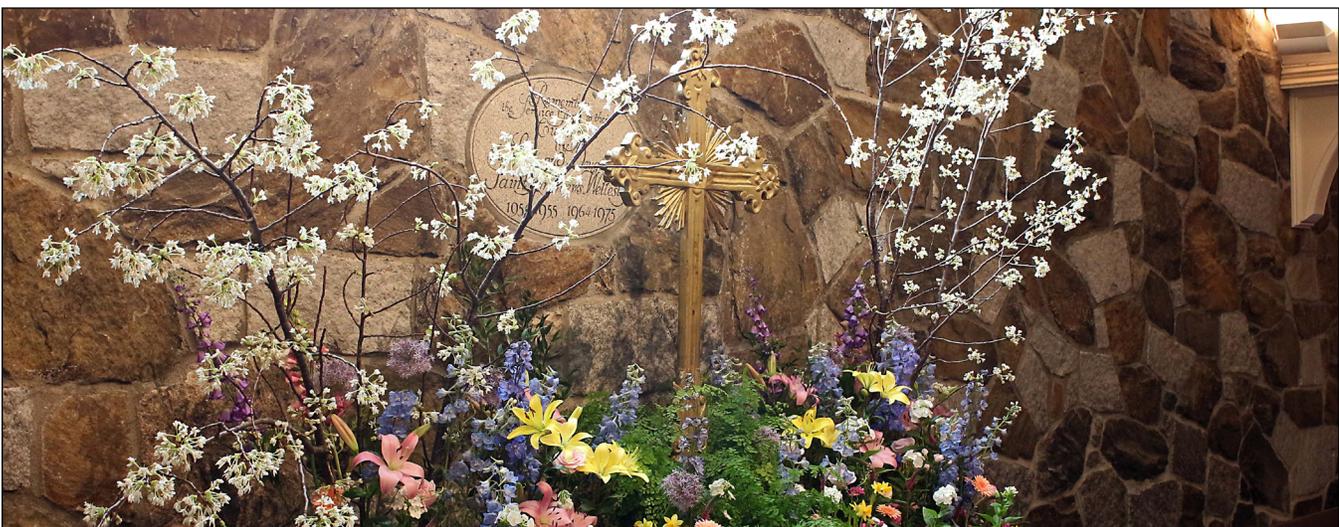


Photo: Peter B. Lull

Returning to Myself: A Reflection on Seasons and Stillness



The Rev. Dr. Sarah Robbins-Cole

■ WAS TOLD THAT ON A GENTLE spring day in Maine, Elizabeth Coatsworth wrote down her poem *Now in the Stillness* for my godmother, Nancy Kennedy. She lived across Damariscotta Lake from the poet. The poem captures a quiet intimacy between the observer and the natural world. It begins simply, yet it carries the depth and gravity of someone who has truly witnessed the slow, deliberate turn of the seasons:

*Now in the stillness and the
aleness
the blossom returns to the tree
and the bird to its nest,
the light returns to the water
the shadow to the boulder
and I return to myself.*

Over the years, my godmother would send this poem to her many goddaughters each spring, like a gentle reminder that the world, like us, emerges again from the long winter months. Each time it arrived in my email, it rang like a small, familiar bell, announcing that winter would not last much longer, and that life, hope, and light would inevitably return.

I find myself thinking of this poem around the time Punxsutawney Phil makes his comically serious proclamation about six more weeks of winter. Most years, I groan along with everyone else

at the thought of continued cold and gray skies, yet beneath that groan is a spark of hope. I see it in the longer, lighter mornings and evenings, in the slow return of warmth to the earth, and in the slow and subtle awakening of life all around us. Spring carries a vitality and energy that winter cannot replicate—a sense of possibility that lifts the spirit in ways that the inward, reflective light of the winter holidays do not.

My godmother passed away last year, and this year I feel drawn to make a ritual of this poem—to feel closer to God, our creator, and to Nancy, who was such a beautiful soul and a profound influence in my life. Beginning on Easter Monday, I plan to take one line of Coatsworth’s poem each week, letting it unfold as a six-day meditation. Maybe you might want to do the same.

This impulse to slow down, to mark time intentionally, to let meaning deepen through repetition is something Casper ter Kuile writes about in *The Power of Ritual*. He reminds us that ritual does not have to be elaborate to be sacred. Simple, intentional practices can help us honor transitions, hold grief, and reconnect with what matters most. Like Coatsworth’s poem turned into weeklong reflection, ritual can transform ordinary moments into vessels of meaning, grounding us in nature’s rhythms, and life’s cycles.

Through these practices, the poem becomes more than words on a page. It becomes a living guide that calls us back to ourselves, invites us to notice subtle miracles, and helps us trust the cyclical beauty of life. Even in loss, in winter, in stillness, there is always a return to light, to life, and ultimately, to the self.

Photos: Peter B. Lull



Parishioner Reflections

Hope Springs Eternal

THE INSPIRATION FOR OUR AUTHORS of this issue of The Call comes from our anticipation of the spring season and Easter, reminding us that life persists, endings are not always what they seem, and hope is never wasted. The personal reflections you'll find in the articles by our clergy and our parishioners invite us to honor the past but cherish the moment as we recognize the miracles of new life all around us. Spring and Easter seem to resonate

together. Look in the articles for signs of new beginnings in all sorts of places, sometimes when least expected. In all the reflections, though, "hope springs eternal," as they say. We hope that this issue of The Call, coming to you just as we enter Holy Week, will help you to enjoy the freshness of the season while keeping the true meaning of Easter—the significance of the resurrected Christ—at the center of your celebrations.

Glimmer of Hope



D.D. Alexander

SAILING FROM CASCO BAY, Maine, to Scituate in Massachusetts, we were trapped in a snow globe of fog. Our boat was surrounded by a dense, gray shroud; the only light, an eerie circle that spot-lit us as we sailed across the silent, still ocean. Hour

after hour we moved across the water, able to see just the rails of our boat. The silence was deafening. Guided only with paper charts and a terrestrial-based radio navigation system developed during WWII, we anxiously plotted our course while looking for confirmation of our position.

Our guidebook claimed that the nearest harbor was Biddeford Pool and under no uncertain terms should one ever try to enter in a fog or at low tide because the channel was narrow and shallow. We needed to find a safe harbor. We needed to find the fog bell that marked the entrance to Biddeford Pool harbor. We could hear the fog bell but could not find it. Lining ourselves up with the bell would allow us to enter the channel safely.

I was below deck trying to convince the yacht club to guide us in, praying harder and longer from the depths of my soul when the captain started yelling, "D.D., D.D., D.D.!" I popped my head above deck and gasped. It was as if the gray skirt had been pulled up. The clarity was shocking—the coast was visible; the channel and the mooring were distinct! I leaped into action, grabbing the boat hook, picking up the mooring, and as I secured the line to the cleat, the fog enveloped us again.

When I am lost in a fog or need a safe harbor, that sight, that glimmer reminds me to pray. Reminds me that "All will be well, and all will be well, and all will be well."



Photo: Leslie Cross via Unsplash

Be Swift to Love and Make Haste to be Kind



Randy Parker

IN MAY 2021, a dear friend of ours died unexpectedly at age 60 after experiencing a medical emergency while traveling abroad. The news was shocking and we were devastated. She was healthy

and energetic and led a life of purpose, connection, and pure joy.

At her memorial service, we learned that her favorite spiritual passage (sitting front and center on her desk) was the benediction that we often hear at St. Andrew's:

"Life is short, and we have too little time to gladden the hearts of those who make the journey with us. So be swift to love and make haste to be kind . . ."

Whenever I hear those words, I of course think of my friend. I'm also reminded of the urgency of our call to share God's love. Out of the grief and despair of a friend's death, comes the glimmer of hope and the reminder that life is precious and we are called to love and support each other—here and now.

As we emerge from the darkness of winter and the solemn period of Lent, we anticipate the glory of Easter and are called to follow the example of Christ. We each have within us the power to bring hope and joy to those we encounter in our daily lives. Little things matter and the smallest gesture—offering a smile, having a genuine and engaged conversation, sending an unexpected note or message—can make a difference.

I hope and pray that the spirit of Easter and the renewal of spring will embolden each of us to serve as a source of the love, compassion, and kindness that our world so desperately needs.

An Easter Memory



Elizabeth Guydan

WHEN I WAS 16 years old, my grandfather, Patrick, died at the age of 88 of pneumonia at the beginning of Holy Week. Although he was elderly, he was a real presence in the lives of his 10 grandchildren. His birthday on St. Patrick's Day was celebrated each year by all of us, with singing (including "Danny Boy" for which I never

knew all the words), homemade birthday cards and gifts, and tremendous love and affection all around. He was a deeply moral man who demonstrated rock-solid Christian values by the way he lived his life—helping neighbors in need, loving his family without reservation, and cultivating a personal relationship with God through prayer. His faith was evident in all aspects of his life. As his grandchildren, these were the most valuable legacies we received.

There were many tears with his death, but I remember talking to my cousin, Peggy, about the significance of his dying during Holy Week. This was surely a sign of God's favor, we thought, and we couldn't wait for Easter Sunday.

Easter brought me joy that year. Of course, I was sad, too, but the Easter message was powerful, and the ideas of resurrection and eter-

nal life were very real to me. As we anticipate the approach of Easter and its promise of new life, I am reminded of what it meant to me all those years ago. My grandfather's death at Eastertime helped me to experience a spiritual awakening and move beyond the sorrow of our family's loss.

Each year, I feel renewed by the messages of life over death and hope that Easter brings, and I feel grateful. I'm grateful for the foundation of faith I received from my family. I'm grateful for my membership in the St. Andrew's family, where my faith is nourished, and I'm grateful to have had such a wonderful grandfather, if only for 16 years.

A Season of Renewal



Rob Veidenheimer

I'VE ALWAYS LOVED the spring. As a happy and committed New Englander I embrace all our seasons, including the crisp quiet of winter, yet spring, with its longer days and promise of both natural and spiritual rebirth, is an especial-

ly joyful time. Thinking back, this was as true as a child growing up in Wellesley, bringing home Easter lilies from Village Church to plant and reengaging in epic neighborhood games, as it is today.

This is the time of year where signs of new, or renewed, life begin to appear all around us. From watching plants and trees bloom, seeing young animals frolic, hearing the happy din of children playing outside, and reconnecting with neighbors and friends after our winter hibernation, our lives are revitalized and enriched in so many ways. I am always energized by these blessings.

As we turn toward spring, I am also heartened to see signs of the renewal of hope after a dark season of unrest in our country. While the

strains are not over, I am comforted and inspired to see people come together in all corners of the country, from all walks of life, to support others in need and spread a message of peace and inclusion that is resonating far and wide. What a powerful and beautiful example of loving your neighbors as yourself! To me, as we approach Easter and its enduring promise of new life, there are hopeful signs of spiritual renewal and an unrelenting arc toward peace for our collective country.

This Easter time, I am very grateful to be a member of the St. Andrew's community as we celebrate the renewal of life together. The signs of spring and rejuvenation are all around us, and we are all so much better for them!



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