

Signs of Spring



Just as we see signs that day is breaking – a lightening of the sky on the distant horizon, a chill in the air – before the sun actually rises, so we see signs of spring before it is officially with us. The first day of spring, my diary tells me, is 20th March, but spring is all around us, and I suspect that global warming is playing havoc with our traditional seasons anyway.

It gives an uplift to see these early signs – the snowdrops, the crocuses and now even daffodils – those indications that a colourful and joyous life begins again. But we know that spring weather can be unpredictable and sometimes treacherous and we fear for the new-born lambs in the fields, the emerging flowers.

This is probably why our symbols of spring are quite tough. I remember the first time I felt a lamb's woolly coat and found the fluffy soft appearance disguised a tough, dense coat, the outer hairs hard and curved to make a waterproof covering over the warming inner. The bulbs that leap to flower in early spring are likewise hardy, emerging from a covering of snow as fresh as ever. I was recently told that Bumblebee queens who emerge from hibernation early in the year are also tough. They all have to be.

The signs of new life do not mean that everything will now be sunny and easy. Signs of emergence from the pandemic do not mean that everything immediately goes back to how it was before. Spring can be a hard, confusing time of sunshine and cold, peril and hope, but a time we have to live through before summer comes.

But there is a human aspect to spring. Some years ago I saw a lay preacher begin his children's address by showing us a bag and asking if we could guess what sign of spring was inside it. We went through all the usual stuff – flowers, rabbit, Easter eggs - then like a conjuror pulling a rabbit from a hat he took from the bag . . . a tin of paint. Spring cleaning.

In faith terms, spring is also a time of 'cleaning' of reflecting on our lives and how we live them. Surely it should also be a time of nurturing the good within each of us, the strengths God has given us so that we can weather the storms, actual and emotional. St Paul wrote these encouraging words: "No testing has overcome you that is not common to everyone. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tested beyond your strength, but with the testing he will also provide the way out so that you may be able to endure it." **(1 Corinthians 10:13)**

We have been through – are still in – a very testing time, and many of us are very weary. The ups and downs of emergence from the pandemic increase our longings for all that will come, for our own summer time, and those longings are different for each one, and run very deep. It may even be that the signs of spring feel almost hurtful, the newness reminding us of our losses.

Perhaps a reminder of God's promise with the sign of the rainbow is needed:

"As long as the earth endures, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night. shall never cease." **(Genesis 8: 22)** We give thanks for the beauty for the present moment and for the promised time to come, which will in time bring its own special blessings.

Something to think about:

What qualities do you have that have helped you cope? These have been a gift from God.

What are your great longings as you look ahead to the summer? These will be a gift from God.

What gives you most joy as you look around you and within yourself? This is a gift from God.

Give thanks!



A Prayer:

Eternal, living Lord, thank you that you have given to each of us the strength to cope with all we have had to face in life thus far.

Some of the hardships we have faced, in everyday living and in our emotional being have left us tired or even exhausted and there have been times we've only just coped. These times can feel very lonely, Lord.

Help us see, in the signs of spring, signs of the new life you offer us and in them find hope and strength.

Thank you for the great sign of your love, the rainbow, that promise of continuing life, and thank you especially for that sign of your eternal love, Jesus, your Son, who in his living, dying and rising again has assured us of true, eternal life. For this we praise and glorify you, confident in the faithfulness of Jesus.

We praise you, too, for the gift of the Holy Spirit, through whose work we are able to discern that which is hopeful and joyful in the world, and see ways forward so that we can live fully to the furtherance of the Kingdom of God, the Kingdom of peace.

Hold in your love, we ask, those who look about them and see only reminders of everything they have lost, those who fear the future.

We bring those who are tender in faith, those who struggle to accept your love in Jesus, asking for them the guiding of the Spirit.

We bring those who are tender in physical and mental health, asking for them your healing and your peace, and alongside we bring with thanksgiving those who work with the ill, the disadvantaged. We bring those who work to find ways forward out of all the change the pandemic has wrought, asking for them the wisdom of the Spirit.

We bring those at home and abroad working the land, that they may be guided in wisdom, and upheld when weary.

Give to us all eyes to see the wonder of renewing life about us, we pray. and hearts warm to care for that new life in nature and in the people about us, for we ask it in the name of Jesus, whose love is new and living each day. Amen

I'll close with a cheerful image of a crowd of spring flowers! Blessings, Ruth

