

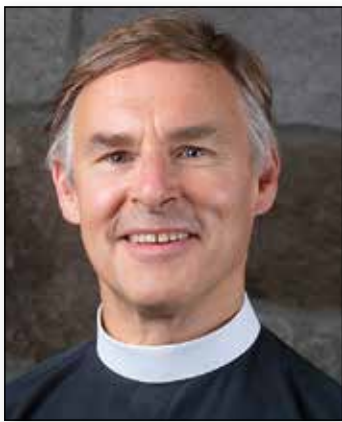
THE CALL

ST. ANDREW'S
EPISCOPAL CHURCH
WELLESLEY, MASSACHUSETTS

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Spring: A Time for New Beginnings

An invitation to Spiritual Renewal



The Rev. Adrian Robbins-Cole

ONE OF THE GREATEST privileges of being the rector at St. Andrew's is the spiritual enrichment I receive from encounters with members of the congregation. While clergy are tasked with nurturing the spiritual lives of their parishioners, I often find my own faith deepened through these interactions. A recent example occurred during our men's Bible study, where we discussed themes of spiritual renewal—a fitting topic for this Lent and Easter edition of *The Call*.

Currently, our group is studying Luke's Gospel. In a recent session, we explored part of the "Sermon on the Plain" (Luke 6:17-49), Luke's counterpart to the more well-known "Sermon on the Mount" in Matthew. In this sermon, Jesus presents a vision for a renewed way of life, encapsulated by the Golden Rule: "Do to others as you would have them do to you."

British historian Tom Holland, in his book *Dominion*, argues that this ethical standard has profoundly

shaped Western thought. He contends that before Christianity, societies like the Roman Empire lacked a sense of universal human value. Christianity introduced the radical idea that every person matters and deserves care, reshaping not only Western civilization but the broader world.

During our men's Bible study discussion, we grappled with some of Jesus' most challenging commands: love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, and turn the other cheek. These high standards sparked nervous laughter among us, as we acknowledged the difficulty of living up to them. One participant pointed out that Jesus calls us to emulate God's unconditional love and forgiveness. We agreed that, despite the daunting nature of these teachings, they offer a vision worth striving for in today's complex and often hostile world. As columnist Peggy Noonan recently observed, religious faith is essential for navigating the 21st century.

Much of our focus, however, was on Jesus' words about judgment: "Why do you see the speck in your neighbor's eye, but do not notice the log in your own eye? How can you say to your neighbor, 'Friend, let me remove the speck in your eye,' when you do not see the log in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your neighbor's eye." (Luke 6:42-43).

This passage reminds us that spiritual renewal begins with ourselves. It requires honest self-examination

and the courage to confront our own moral failings. In a time when trust in information from the media, government, and other institutions is waning—and when artificial intelligence can generate falsehoods—it's critical to be truthful with ourselves about our shortcomings.

The same principle applies spiritually. We can deceive ourselves about our flaws, creating a false image of who we are.

I have recently been reading Joseph Conrad's novel, *Lord Jim*, which illustrates this vividly. Its protagonist, Jim, believes himself to be brave until a crisis exposes his cowardice. Reading this story challenged me to reflect on whether my own spiritual self-perception aligns with reality. As one participant in the Bible study group noted, if we cannot recognize the "logs" in our own eyes, how can we hope to renew ourselves spiritually?

This is why Lent is so significant. It invites us to pause, examine our lives, and confront our moral weaknesses. This process can be painful—it often involves relinquishing comforting illusions about ourselves. It's a Good Friday moment that paves the way for the Easter promise of new life. Thankfully, we are not alone in this journey. God, through the power of the Holy Spirit, helps us achieve what seems impossible.

Yours in Christ,

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Warden's Letter

Anticipation of Spring



Tom Faust, warden

IN THE SMALL Arkansas town where I grew up in the 1960s and 1970s, a much-loved springtime tradition for elementary school children was celebrating May Day. Unlike some May Day celebrations I've read about, we didn't light bonfires, dance around a maypole, crown a special queen for the day, or pray to the Virgin Mary. Instead, we knocked off classes early and spent the afternoon in a carnival atmosphere of sports competition—sprints and long-distance running races, sack races, and three-legged races—and excessive consumption of sugary drinks,

fried foods, and salty snacks that would make any state fair attendee proud. In my memory, the weather was always perfect and, alas, I never won—or came close to winning—any blue ribbons.

As much as I fondly recall May Day, I remember even more relishing the anticipation of that special day. Decades past my last May Day celebration, even today I continue to enjoy the *anticipation* that naturally accompanies springtime—the reawakening of the outdoors in a burst of birdsong, budding trees and flowers, the planning of summer getaways, and the hope that this might be the year the Red Sox pull it back together.

In the Christian calendar, spring opens with the commemoration of Lent and the anticipation of Christ's Resurrection on Easter Sunday. It seems fitting that our celebration of the Resurrection and the reawakening of the natural world have become so intertwined (*see* Easter Bunny). As we anticipate the coming blossoming days of spring and summer, may we open our hearts to the Resurrection message of love, hope, and renewal through life in Christ.



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Hidden Beginnings



The Rev. Margaret K. Schwarzer

*You send forth your Spirit, they are created;
and so you renew the face of the earth.*
—Psalm 104:31

RENEWAL, from the outside, often appears to happen suddenly. Especially in the springtime, renewal can seem almost magical in its speed and transformation. What was barren ground is suddenly covered in snowdrops or daffodils; the bare branch is suddenly covered in buds. But when I consider the deep-down renewal that lasts, I usually discover that renewal happens in hidden and unseen ways first, long before there is evidence of change. This is even true of flowers. Long before we see them,

tough little seeds are pushing up to 25 times their own weight of dirt and muck out of the way to reach the surface, where the sun can shine down on them.

I'm fond of John's account of Easter Day, which acknowledges the mystery of renewal. It tells us that even resurrection began in the dark. Says John, "Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene came to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the tomb." (John 20:1) "While it was still dark" Jesus burst out of the tomb. While it was still dark, and most of Jerusalem was sleeping, new life and new hope began for humankind. Resurrection didn't need us to see it to be effective. We humans didn't know it happened until we witnessed it ourselves, but God's renewal was God's renewal—strong, true, real—even before we saw it.

What does this mean for us? For me, it reminds me to keep working on the places in my own character and my own life that need renewal, even if I don't see the change I want to see yet. It reminds me that God's grace is at work in me and in all of us, so I should not underestimate God, or God's grace,

even on the days I'm feeling a little weary or discouraged about change myself.

I also think about giraffes and flamingos. Why? Because they have astonishing strengths that are not immediately obvious. Giraffes, seemingly mild-mannered, scare lions because their sharp hooves can bash in lions' heads if lions attack them. Lions don't attack giraffes because giraffes are gentle but powerful defenders. No wonder they confidently and casually lope around the plains of Africa. And flamingos? Because of thousands of years growing up near hot springs, pink flamingos can drink water that is nearly boiling. Yes, nearly boiling water. They gulp it down as if it were nothing. Flamingos can drink salt water, too, if fresh water isn't available. They can renew themselves with water that would kill humans; astonishing. If such seemingly benign and delicate creatures have that much strength and resilience in them, I'm encouraged to believe each of us has an oasis in our souls (known to God if not always known to us) that can help us find the renewal and new life we seek. Renewal is part of God's holy work in the world.

The Great Clothes Migration

A Reflection on Letting Go



The Rev. Dr. Sarah Robbins-Cole

One of my favorite traditions of spring is the “great clothes migration.” As the weather warms, I swap out my winter wardrobe—coats, boots, and sweaters—for lighter spring and summer clothes. It’s a time when I wish I did more culling of my clothes, as I’ve accumulated far too many over the years. Still, I find joy in the ritual of folding up those heavy items that kept me warm through the cold months and unpacking the clothes I haven’t seen since the fall. Though I often keep more than I should, there’s something meditative about this process of organizing and refreshing.

At first glance, this might seem like a superficial task, but for me,

it’s about more than just clothes. It’s an act of creating outer order, which helps settle my inner world. There’s something prayerful in it, too. As I fold each item, I remember with gratitude who gave it to me, where I bought it, or who I was with when I first wore it. These clothes carry memories and connections, making the task feel more sacred than it may seem.

The hardest part of the process, though, is the mess in the middle. Clothes are piled up everywhere, and it feels like progress will never come. But I remind myself: no progress can be made without clearing out the old. This chaos mirrors what happens in our spiritual and emotional lives. Just as we pack away our winter clothes, we’re also called to consider what old ways of living are no longer serving us.

In the Epistle to the Ephesians, the author writes, “You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self. . . and to put on the new self.” The clothes migration is a physical representation of this deeper spiritual work—of letting go of old habits, fears, and mindsets that no longer fit who we are becoming.

If you’re unsure what to let go of, I recommend the book *Let Them* by Mel Robbins. While it doesn’t offer groundbreaking ideas, it gently reminds us of what we often cling to—control, perfection, and the need to manage others. Robbins encourages us to embrace the concept of “let me,” giving ourselves permission to pursue what truly matters after we’ve let go of what no longer serves us.

Letting go is about making room for growth and renewal. It’s not just about discarding physical items but about creating space in our hearts and minds. As we clear out the clutter, we allow room for new opportunities, habits, and ways of thinking.

Closing Thought

The change of seasons is a reminder that to embrace the new, we must first release the old. Just like sorting through our wardrobes, letting go of outdated habits and thoughts frees us to grow. As you move through this spring, ask yourself: What do you need to let go of? By making space for what truly matters, we open the door to transformation and renewal.



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Parishioner Reflections

The Rhythm of Life

EACH DAY, WE AWAKEN to a blank canvas that is waiting for our brushstrokes. We are co-creators of our lives because, as our contributing authors

remind us, God's hand is always present. May we experience the awe of creation all around us with hope for the future this spring season.



Photo: Rob Brandt

A Flood of Springtime Memories



Janet Giele

THE REQUEST FROM The Call to write about springtime brought back a flood of memories. In the spring of 1945, when I was 11 years old, World War II ended. It was such a time of relief and rejoicing. My family were all out in the garden when the news came. It was the end of gas

and food rationing, and we could get a new car!

But springtime was also double-sided. First, "Out with the old!" That meant taking out the cinders from the furnace, cleaning away the cobwebs, shoveling water out of the basement after the Ohio spring thaw, and washing the curtains. Then "In with the new!" My sister and I got new pink and white print dresses for Easter. At church, Mother wore a hat, and other mothers wore corsages on their lapels.

On Sunday afternoons, I would take walks in the old-growth woods behind our house. I especially loved finding the spring beauties, the bloodroot, and once a rare hepatica!

Now 80 years later, living in a beautiful Boston suburb, my springtime thoughts are more

abstract and philosophical. Isn't it amazing that we can count on spring coming every year, that this happens all over the world! Nor did we humans make spring happen; we are creatures who did not make ourselves.

That is where religion comes in. Just as Stone Age people showed some sign of spiritual awe with their circle of plinths and a tunnel lit by the longest day of the year, we mark the yearly coming of spring with our celebration of Easter.

This is a universal insight of people everywhere: we live in a world where spring comes every year, and the message of Easter is one of new life that follows every winter of discouragement or discontent.

The Promise of New Life



Greg Urban

AS NATURE AWAKENS from its winter slumber, this spring holds special meaning for my family as we welcome

our newest member—a Cavalier King Charles Spaniel puppy named “Wee Gillis,” after Munro Leaf’s beloved 1938 children’s book about a young Scottish boy who plays the bagpipes. His arrival at our home on St. Andrew’s Sunday in November seemed divinely timed, bringing Scottish charm to our household. Just as spring brings forth new growth, watching Gillis discover the world reminds us of life’s precious beginnings.

Each day brings fresh adventures: his first encounter with snow on his snout, meeting and building relationships with other dogs in our neighborhood, and the joy

of mastering new skills in Puppy Kindergarten. His boundless curiosity and vibrant energy mirror the season’s promise of growth and renewal.

As first-time dog owners, we too are growing and learning. Sometimes, like spring seedlings, I need patience and must be nurturing to flourish in my new “dog dad” role. Gillis teaches valuable lessons about boundless energy, unconditional love, patience, and the beauty of starting anew—lessons that echo the very essence of our faith.

A Time for Rebirth



Heather Schaefer

FOR AS LONG AS I CAN remember, part of my prayer routine has ended with a line from Phillips Brooks’s well-known hymn, “O Little Town of Bethlehem.” The final verse of the hymn includes this line: “Cast out our sin, and enter in, be born in us today.” Of course, this is a perfect line for a

song sung at Christmastime as we welcome Jesus into the world and into our hearts.

However, I would argue that spiritual rebirth can, and does happen any time of year, daily even. As I welcome spring, I am going to do some “spiritual housekeeping” as the author of *Every Day Spirit*, Mary Davis, encourages:

We can release old commitments that we have continued out of habit.

We can release material things by gifting them to those who truly need them.

We can release addictive behaviors that no longer serve the soul.

We can release some of our fear, and negativity.

We can release unkindness toward ourselves.

We can release the habit of constant worry.

As the air warms and the light softens, as birds and furry creatures celebrate the lengthening of days, I hope that I, too, will celebrate and live more fully into the life I am called to live. I’m looking forward to gathering with my Soul Sisters as we explore our faith, develop friendships, and learn how to care for ourselves and our souls. I’m also looking forward to further exploration of John’s Gospel in the Beginner’s Bible study group. St. Andrew’s provides many opportunities to recommit, to let God enter in, and be born in us anew!

Looking Forward



Charley Scott

MY SIX-YEAR-OLD daughter and I share a dislike of short winter days. I sometimes struggle to understand what our children are thinking, so when Lizzy tells me she feels sad on account of a dark Decem-

ber afternoon, it's nice to be able to answer, "I know just what you mean!" I make a point of telling her when the winter solstice occurs and pointing out that we can then look forward to brighter days ahead. Indeed, one of the things that makes spring my favorite season is the bit of optimism that I get from contemplating that each day will be longer—and therefore hold that much more promise—than the one before.

Like many people, I need some optimism this spring. Winter has been as dark as I had expected, and (for me) still marked by periodic grief over losing my father last year. Among other pangs, I have on a few occasions found myself momentarily overwhelmed by the Nicene Creed's reference to "the

living and the dead" with a fresh realization that my father is counted among the latter. This spring, I hope instead to be struck by thoughts of happy little moments with him, such as walking to the school bus stop together on a cool but sunny morning.

I am also looking forward to seeing our children continue to form springtime memories of their own. Maybe one day they will think back to seeing the daffodils they planted with their mother begin to emerge, to eating shards of a giant chocolate egg, or to being allowed to wear shorts outside again. Perhaps they'll find themselves humming "Jesus Christ is risen today, Alleluia!" The renewal of spring makes it easier for me to hope that good things lie ahead.



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