

Sermon Archive 601

Sunday 30 August, 2026

Knox Church, Ōtautahi Christchurch

Spring Flower Reflection

Preacher: Rev. Dr Matthew Jack



An Introduction: Light and Life

God creates light.

Maybe the image to capture the imagination is a soft glow - just so small to begin with that we wonder whether it's there at all. It wasn't there before, but now the glow - slowly emerging in the dark, gradually stretching its dawn towards our eyes. That little shoot of green on a tree in Bealey Ave - was it there yesterday? - we didn't notice it yesterday, but its beginnings might have been there. So with this first coming of light. We'll say, eventually, that the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness doesn't overcome it - but maybe its coming was gentle.

The alternative image of course would be the great, sudden, overwhelming flash of light that fills the whole in an instant - something like a bang that's big. Glorious, electric, energetic, amazing. The darkness will never again be the same. God creates light - and it is so.

God creates life.

It begins with the things of Spring - tender shoots, pushing their heads up through the soil - from the hidden places, now into view. And it's green and soft, but also very strong, determined - it has "life **force**". And buds and flowers, colours that delight, not one exactly like the other - infinitely profuse and diverse and beautiful. Why is life so beautiful? Something of the fingerprint of the Creator, beauty from beauty, life from life.

The act of creation continues with the swarms of swimming things filling the sea - gliding, darting, hovering. And the insects, spiders and creeping things that creep! And the calves or cows (do we start with calf or cow - like the chicken and the egg - bends the mind, doesn't it! How does life emerge? It's a mystery, held in the mind of God. It just was so, and it was good.)

It's not finished, you know. There is one more kind of life still to come. It is self-reflective life - life that is aware of its existence, life that looks at itself and wonders about how it came to be. This is a life that ponders eternity, and measures spans and seasons. Memento mori, et memento vivere. Remember death - and don't forget to live! God's pondering, worshipping, dreaming creatures. Let's put **them** also into the garden of those who live.

The First Lesson: Song of Songs 2: 8-13

A Reflection: Love and Springtime

As the self-aware, reflective practitioners of life enter the garden, you could expect them to reflect on self-awareness - since that's their special gift (is it?). You could expect one of them to say "the unexamined life is not worth living - remember Socrates' "what's it about for the responsible being". Or maybe "Cogito ergo sum, i think, therefore I am" - like Descartes leaping from consciousness, out of doubt into confidence that the world is real. A good Enlightenment approach - celebrate the rational human being - God as reason!

Praise God, this human being doesn't race for reason. It falls in love. Her beloved is like a gazelle, a young stag. They peep at each other through the lattices, the dark eye glances through the windows. They see; they joy; they yearn; they long; they call one to the other "arise my love, my fair one, and come away." They rhapsodise, they delight.

So into the world they go, hand in hand, and heart in heart. And they see that the winter is past, the rain is over and gone. Flowers are appearing on the earth, and the voice of the turtledove is heard. The fig tree flourishes and the vines blossom. Springtime is the image of God's creatures of love living in the world.

The light shines, and living things live - the swimming things swim. The creeping things creep. And the description for love entering the world is steeped in the language of Spring.

Each year, we walk our way through the winter - darkness and cold - and rest. And then, bringing our flowers to church in late August, we let ourselves be warmed by visions of God giving the Spring - of life coming to life, of love saying "arise, and come away with me" into a world renewed. Pluck the fig from the tree. The winter is past - so eat, love, grow. Blossom speaks of the coming warmth. Bless the flowers.

Embrace the Spring. Let it speak of God's bringing the world to life. Arise, my love, and come away.

I have a colleague who has a set of friends, with whom he gathers every second Thursday night for a couple of drinks. Within the circle of friends, a long-married couple seemed to be falling out of love. When it ended, no one expressed surprise. There was a sense of acceptance - sorrow too, of course. But maybe there was an element of hope for something better in the future for each of them. Following a long Autumn, winter had arrived. That's just how it was.

One day, my colleague was told that a special guest would be dropping by to join the group for drinks. The group was encouraged to be kind and welcoming - because it's difficult for a new person to enter a circle. My colleague tells me that when she arrived, and the sad man rose to meet her at the door, a great beaming smile possessed his face. Joy had not been seen for a long time. It was obvious that the winter now was past, the Spring had come. God's work of healing, and blessing, and gifting had proceeded. Arise, my love, my fair one, and come away. The rain is over, flowers appear on the earth - the world is fragrant.

In the Song of Songs, the coming of the Spring is a metaphor for God making things new. We, who are loved by God, hear the call to be loved, and then to love, and to step into God's Springtime life. The warmth is coming - and we give thanks to God.

Knox Singers

The Second Lesson: Romans 8: 18-25

A Reflection: The coming warmth

He's writing a letter to a community that's in something of a winter of discontent. They are Christians in Rome, seat of the evil Empire, dealing with the kind of darkness that seeks to overcome the light. (The darkness did **not** overcome it.) The winter consists of persecutions meted out by a mad Emperor wanting to find a scapegoat for a fire his own people started. We won't dwell on this - but persecutions included public executions - Christians dressed in animal skins and torn apart by dogs or set on fire (fire for fire) - the sufferings of this present time. As Paul says "the whole creation groans", we say "Amen". It does.

But then he says that this groaning is not like the groaning of death - a final gasp. These are like the groans of child-birth - because there is within the faith of the suffering community, a kind of Springtime - a coming of life.

I thirst. Eloi, Eloi, lama Sabathani, the loud cry and the ripping of the temple curtain. **Those** are the cries of dying. But now the suffering Church groans together in the pains of a labour. What is being born? What is the nature of this Spring? What hope inhabits the waiting? Something that echoes "he is risen; he is risen indeed"? I don't know - but Paul says that the first-fruits of the new creation are appearing - the warmth is coming. So now, it's a matter of seeing what is appearing, and hoping for the rest. We see, we do not see. We wonder when the first green shoot appeared on the trees in Bealey Ave; and we can't tell you whether God's light came in a flash or in a glow. There's much we do not see, and for which we must hope.

Hope that peace may come to Gaza - that peace will come to Ukraine. Hope that child poverty will end in these islands, and that the food banks will be able to close. Hope that a young woman will be able to get a job. Hope that the old man won't fall, and will know instead the arms of love and safety. Hope that loneliness will ease. Hope that the peace-makers will be blessed, and the mourners will be comforted - that the humble be lifted up, and the haughty sent empty away? Faith says that the warmth is coming.

On this Spring Flower Sunday, we entertain the poetry and beauty of it all. We do not turn it into theory or tidy doctrine. We bless our flowers, and send them out in love. We detect the first signs of the coming warmth - and we let it speak to us of the God who calls us to life.

A blessed Spring Flower Sunday to you. Let us keep now a moment of quiet.