

# First Congregational Church Weekly Newsletter

East Longmeadow, MA



April 1, 2026

## HOLY WEEK

MAUNDY THURSDAY April 2 at 7 pm

*A service of readings and the Lord's Supper.*

EASTER SUNDAY April 5 at 10 am

*Uplifting preaching, warm fellowship and inspiring hymns will make this a memorable day.*

## PASTORAL MEDITATION by Reverend Thomas Hawkins

### SOME THOUGHTS ON BEAN TENDRILS, CORN TAPROOTS, ... AND RESURRECTION

Thanks to Jan's recommendation, I've started reading Michael Pollan's new book "A World Appears: A Journey into Consciousness." Pollan's book explores what we think of as our most distinctively "human" quality—our inner feeling of being "us," of how we come to a sense of a self with feelings and thoughts.

In recent centuries, we've thought this capacity for personal consciousness was something unique to humans. The French philosopher René Descartes thought animals were simply mechanical machines because, lacking language, they could not possibly have had thoughts or feelings. Their whimpers and cries were no different than a machine's grinding and squeaking, Descartes asserted. Now, however, scientists with new tools and different questions are exploring if other living things are more similar to us than we've long been willing to believe.

In one chapter, Pollan interviews Dr. Paco Calvo, an Italian researcher at the International Laboratory of Plant Neurobiology outside Florence, Italy. Calvo shows him a video that tracks the root of a corn plant as it navigates a maze he has constructed where a small quantity of ammonium nitrate fertilizer has been hidden in a far corner. Just like a mouse searching for the cheese, the corn plant's white taproot worms its way through the maze, turning this way or that as it finds the most direct path to the fertilizer. If it were a mouse or dog, we'd describe this behavior as demonstrating intelligence and perhaps conscious decision-making about what route to follow. Is the corn plant's taproot showing will, decision, and intention as it races through the maze? Calvo thinks it does.

Calvo later shows Pollan time-lapsed photography of a young bean plant as it grows. The tip of the bean plant slowly spirals through space, exploring its environment, seemingly looking for something to climb. You can almost feel what we call "purpose" in its movements, according to Pollan. It seems already to know where the metal pole a short distance away is waiting for it. The slender bean tendril throws itself over and over toward this particular object. It reaches, stretches, casts itself over and over as it attempts to wrap its curling tip around the pole. As soon as it reaches the pole, the whole plant seems to relax. Previously clenched leaves flutter lightly. Does this behavior suggest intention? Reason? Will? Calvo believes it does.

What is happening here? Is it simply an attempt to project our own wishes and expectations onto other non-human living things? Who knows. I'll have to reach the end of Pollan's book to find out.

Calvo and the other scientists that Pollan interviews are not alone in thinking along these lines. Nature writer Robert MacFarlane's latest and best-selling book is entitled "Is A River Alive?" MacFarlane explores the question some environmental activists are asking: "Does a river and its tributaries as well as the living creatures who depend upon it have legal status? Is a river alive and therefore have legal rights?"

This Sunday is Easter. During Holy Week, Pollan and MacFarlane have prompted me to think about Jesus' resurrection in new ways. In our modern world, most of us have been trained in the scientific method and to think empirically that facts can be tested and proven true or false. But now we have tools to ask new questions and explore new phenomena that previously were invisible because they occur at perceptions of time and space outside our way of perceiving or thinking about the world. Like a corn plant's taproot racing through a maze to reach the fertilizer it wants. Like a bean tendril seemingly intentionally fly fishing toward a metal support it needs.

The Easter proclamation of Jesus' resurrection seems like an impossibility. Inert matter – like a dead body – is just lifeless stuff. All living processes have ceased. Inert matter does not re-animate itself. The idea of Jesus' resurrection, is at best a product of pre-modern thinking. At worst, it is a fable made up by Jesus' earliest followers to cope with their grief and desire to keep alive some memory of his presence among them. But what if many things we've thought were mere matter actually are more "alive" than we have presumed? Like a bean tendril or a corn plant's taproot?

The resurrection is the great mystery of the Christian faith. The church historically has called it the foundation on which everything else depends. As Paul tells the Corinthian church, "If Christ has not been raised, our preaching is a delusion and so is your faith." (I Cor 15:14). In our more reflective moments many of us harbor some confusion about what we are actually saying we believe when we come to the lines in the Apostles' Creed that Jesus "was crucified under Pontius Pilate; died and was buried...the third day he rose again from the dead..."

Preachers and theologians have spilled a lot of ink over how we ought to understand the resurrection. Or in telling us there is no explanation and that we must simply believe it as a matter of faith. I know what I mean when I speak about the resurrection and most likely you'll hear a bit about that on Easter morning. And, as I've been reading Pollan and MacFarlane's books, I am beginning to imagine phenomena, like the resurrection, that our mathematical reasoning and scientific method have traditionally dismissed as impossible that may not be as far-fetched as we have assumed. As Shakespeare writes in "Hamlet" - "There are more things in Heaven and Earth, Horatio, than are dreamt of in your philosophy."

Easter Blessings, Pastor Thomas

**SUNDAY WORSHIP** in the sanctuary or livestream link: <http://www.facebook.com/churchontherotary/>

### **PUB THEOLOGY TUESDAY APRIL 7**

Pub theology will be gathering next Tuesday the 7<sup>th</sup> We have had as many as 19 people. A wonderful way to relax and get to know others in our church family. Please let me know whether you will be coming. I will try to make a reservation for 6 pm. Please drive directly there.

### **PRAYER FOR HOLY WEEK**

Draw us forth, God of all creation. Draw us forward and away from limited certainty into the immense world of your love. Give us the capacity to even for a moment taste the richness of the feast you give us. Give us the peace to live with uncertainty,  
with questions,  
with doubts.

Help us to experience the resurrection anew with open wonder and an increasing ability to see you in the people of Easter. Amen.



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