

First Congregational Church Weekly Newsletter

East Longmeadow, MA

April 29, 2026



PASTORAL MEDITATION by Reverend Thomas Hawkins

LOVE IS COME AGAIN LIKE EARTH THAT SPRINGETH GREEN

Spring has arrived practically everywhere all at once. Daffodils and tulips virtually jumped out of the ground after a few warm, sunny days in mid-April. Flowering crab apple and Bradford pear trees are exploding into blossom. If you park in the church's southside parking lot on Sunday, be sure to pause and enjoy all the spring flowers blooming in the garden nestled against the exterior of Butler Hall. (And also a word of gratitude to all those members who tend these beautiful flowerbeds throughout the year)!

One of my favorite Easter-season carols comes from a collection of Finnish springtime carols dating from the 16th century – a part of the northern hemisphere that certainly would have been eager to celebrate spring's arrival. Although it has disappeared from most hymnals, you can find it in a few older ones. The first verse of "Spring has now unwrapped the flowers" sings:

*Spring has now unwrapped the flowers,
day is fast reviving,
life in all her growing powers
towards the light is striving:
gone the iron touch of cold,
winter time and frost time,
seedlings, working through the mould,
now make up for lost time.*

The second verse goes on to sing of how

*Herb and plant that, winter long,
slumbered at their leisure,
now bestirring, green and strong,
find in growth their pleasure;*

The final verse then praises God as an "artist without rival" who blesses and renews all creation and reminds us that "beauty follows all [God's] ways."

Each spring I find myself humming this carol as I watch the swelling buds on maple trees open into tiny green tips that within one to two weeks become fully grown leaves, according to dendrologists and arborists. I have been peering intently at my flowerbeds since early April, trying to see if my perennials have survived this past winter's fierce cold and snow. Until about a week ago, I had been wondering if my swamp milkweed and King Solomon's seal had survived. Then, suddenly one morning, tiny green shoots hesitantly smiled out at me from amid dead stalks and rotting leaf litter.

As April's days grow longer and the sun's warmth becomes stronger, living things in our northern hemisphere feel the subtle pull of spring's energy rising in them. This energy is quiet but potent. It pulls life out of frosty soil and last fall's barren debris. The same energy is also rising in us, rousing us out of winter's lethargy and gloom. It's the time of the year the author of the Song of Songs tells us to stir ourselves to life once more: "For behold, the winter is past; the rain is over and gone. The flowers appear on the earth, the time of singing has come, and the voice of the turtledove is heard in our land. The fig tree ripens its figs, and the vines are in blossom; they give forth fragrance. Arise, my love, my beautiful one..." (2:11-3)

Our energies—spiritual, emotional, physical—are rising; but only because our lives are rooted in the depths of God's mercy and goodness. Life's energies hidden deep in buried roots begin to stir and rise upwards in response to spring's warmth and light. So it is also with our lives. Spring energy, Easter energy, is all about being so deeply rooted that we have freedom to rise, expand, stretch: Like the oak tree rooted deeply in the earth but stretching toward the light with its 200,000 to 700,000 expanding new leaves.

All this rising energy in nature is a reminder of the Risen Christ who comes to fill us with the Spirit's movement, power, and energy. The Risen Christ rises from death's dark tomb and calls us forth to live once more in the light of God's care and mercy. Even in our secular age, we think of this post-Easter season as a time for "spring cleaning," for opening our windows and letting fresh wind blow away winter's stale air. These weeks following Christ's resurrection are a time to ask ourselves what spiritual nourishment we need to flourish and thrive in this season of deepening roots and growing faithfulness. As the prophet Hosea challenges us, "Let us know; let us press on to know the LORD; his going out is sure as the dawn; he will come to us as the showers, as the spring rains that water the earth." (6:3) Here are a few suggestions for springtime, Eastertide, spiritual disciplines:

- Go outside and take a walk. Breathe deeply. Smell the fresh earth and the scent of shrubs and flowers. Listen to the songs of returning birds. Let God's creation nourish your spirit. If it's hard for you to get outside or walk, find a quiet spot, close your eyes and let your imagination fill your mind with beauty you've seen in past springtime seasons.
- Take advantage of earth's rising energies by sitting quietly somewhere comfortable and asking yourself, "What positive energies and possibilities are rising up within me? What seeds has God planted in the soil of my life that are pushing toward the light?" Explore what you might do to nourish the green shoots that God is calling forth from within you.
- Easter's rising energy can push its way through barren soil and brush aside the leaf litter and debris of past seasons in our lives. Find a park bench or patio chair where you can firmly plant your feet on the ground. Feel the strong earth below you. Then get in touch with the bare places – the places that are cold, grieving, or in pain – in your life. Imagine these painful places being watered by God's gentle love and released into greening life just as spring's warm showers awaken dry roots and release them to blossom and flower in the world around us.

Easter energy is rising in each of us because Christ is risen. Alleluia. Alleluia. Alleluia. Our Creator, as that early Easter carol sings, takes pleasure in our growth and we should too. As another Easter carol that we sang just before Easter says (Hymnal #208):

*Now the green blade riseth from the buried grain,
Wheat that in dark earth many days has lain;
Love lives again, that with the dead has been
Love is come again, like wheat that springeth green...*

*When our hearts are wintry, grieving, or in pain,
Thy touch can call us back to life again,
Fields of our hearts that dead and bare have been:
Love is come again, like wheat that springeth green...*

Blessings this Eastertide, Pastor Thomas

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

NOTE FROM YOUR MODERATOR: *The annual meeting is in 3 weeks!*

This year the First Congregational Church of East Longmeadow/UCC Annual Meeting will be held immediately after service in the sanctuary **on May 17**. The warrant to call the meeting with the details and agenda is posted. The first item will be to read and vote to accept the presented slate of officers and Board members that will be presented prior to the meeting in the annual report from church leadership. There will be a few changes, as is normal, to some of the Boards and committees so if you, as a member, feel like you want to engage with a particular board please reach out!

SPRING PLANT SALE

Spring is here and it is time to dig, split and pot up your perennials, shrubs, vines, ground covers, etc. for us to sell at our annual plant sale. It will be held on **May 9th from 9am-1pm**. We are looking for volunteers to work the day of the fair and on Friday as we set up for the sale.

We will also be looking for **donations of cookies, brownies, breads, and any other baked goods** to sell that day as well. If you have any garden or yard related items that you would like to donate for our tag sale, you can place them on the stage anytime before the sale. We are looking for things like pretty pots, vases, garden tools, statuary, bird houses, garden books, yard games, etc. If you have any books, puzzles or used jewelry, we can use those for our sale as well. It is a good time to clean out your sheds, garages, closets and shelves. We will put your donations to good use.

Thanks so much in advance for your participation and donations.

The Spring Plant Sale Committee

Springfield YWCA - 5th largest in the country

The Springfield Y exists to fulfill its mission of eliminating racism, empowering women, and promoting peace, justice, freedom, and dignity for all. The Y provides safe places for women and children in crisis. It provides shelter, support services, and tools for self-sufficiency for women and girls in our community. It operates an 11-acre campus in Springfield that provides shelter to battered women and their children in a modern facility with state of the art computerized security. When women and their children arrive having fled a dangerous situation in their homes, they arrive with nothing but the clothes on their backs. The Y provides them with a basket of necessary toiletries. We can help, we can offer our support. Please read carefully and donate any of the following items:

- Full size -NEW - soap, body wash, body moisturizer, mouthwash, toothbrushes and paste,
- ***shampoo and conditioner, etc. from brands: Shea Moisture, Pattern Beauty, Mielle, Camille Rose, Curl Mix, CURLS, The Doux, Miss Jessie's,
- feminine hygiene products,
- baby wipes & disposable diapers (especially large)
- coloring books and crayons,
- board games and cards
- GENTLY USED books for children, teens and adults

Please leave your donations in the breezeway until May 31. Thank you for your continued support of this truly life-saving agency right in our own back yard. We can really help out these families in crisis.

PRAYER

O God, your Son remained with his disciples after his resurrection, teaching them to love all people as neighbors. You made the world in beauty and you restore all things in glory through the victory of Jesus Christ. Help us during these spring days to slow down, to look, and listen for the new life stirring and blossoming in the world around us. Stir up your Spirit within us and water our dry lives with the gentle rain of your love that our lives may grow and blossom into fruitful discipleship in the world. Amen.



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