

At Long Last!

Text: Song of Solomon 2: 8-17

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The afternoon arrived . . . as a gift from on high. Just the day before had been far too cold to take a walk without the bundles and layers of winter. But now the breeze was soft and warmly flirting in the mid-sixties.

An ebullient voice beacons from the side-yard as our neighbor motioned us to come out. She was almost singing, nearly chanting, "Finally, at long last, it feels we have all been hibernating way too long!"

Her husband joined in and before long, other neighbors across the way came out as well. As pagan as it sounds we declared winter's grip to be over and done and pronounced the late-coming arrival of spring.

A beautiful moment . . . filled in around us as the emergence of spring and the weeks we call Eastertide comingled, as if to turn on the same set of hinges. And though we didn't use the words of Spirit, our souls were so hungry for it, nearly starving.

Bill Coffin, always a prince with words¹:

*We knew it would finally come, but no matter.
It is certain now that energy soon
will be pouring out of the ground
and into every blade of grass;
into every flower, bush and tree;
we knew that soon the robins will join the pigeons,
the sky will be full of the thunder of the sun,
the shaggy mountains will stomp their feet,
and the waves will toss high
and clap their wild blue hands!*

Out of context, but right on time, another phrase from the bible comes to mind: "Come and see!"

Come and taste and feel and hold and open your hearts. There is nascent birthing all around. Spring has finally confirmed what we heard on Easter. The buds, the sprouts, the smells, the sounds are all about life, new chances, fresh beginnings.

But a deeper . . . awareness pokes in and says: "Whoa! Wait a minute! Not so fast!" And with good reason! Those who think large thoughts remind us that though we might want

to blend spring and the season of Easter as one, there is far more than meets the eye here. To merge them too closely diminishes the power of them both. It also puts us on a slippery slope.

Spring is a natural process. It has to do with the sun and the cycles of earth's turning on her axis. It's mysterious and wonderful, sacred and holy, but it can be explained. It's predictable and reasonably timely (well, except for this year!), and both returns and departs as the planets and balance of the universe calls.

But not nearly so with Easter. Though God is in everything that turns in the universe, God is not synonymous solely with nature; and Easter is not merely a mirror of the rebirth of spring. In fact, the resurrection story at the core of this faith of ours is not dependent on nature at all and is entirely unnatural, unpredictable, and untimely.

Our scripture today. . . connects us with ancient wisdom about this and beautifully so. It links love and life together, eternity and now, the turning of seasons and the unfailing promises of God into a poem full of spirit and flesh, earth and heaven.

It's from a passage in Song of Solomon that comes packaged with an outright blush factor as it mingles human desire with divine love.

*Arise my love, my fair one and come away with me!
For now the winter is past, the rain is over and gone;
the flowers appear again on the earth,
the time for singing has come;
and the voice of the turtledove is heard in our land.
My beloved is mine and I am his;
he pastures his flock among the lilies,
until the day breathes and the shadows flee.*

Last weekend Teresa Thomaston sang those words as if she was telling her very own love story with God. But it was not as if she was singing a song, rather the song was singing her. It was deep and of the soul. I looked around from my perch in the balcony and felt the spirit rise in this room. It was palpable as all of us - all 400 - were lifted to that place where our hearts and the deep heart of God were beating as one.

Well this stirs . . . in me today as we worship together. All of it: the at-long-last arrival of spring; the ways that we rightly converge it with Easter, the ways that we do so in error; the feelings of hibernation now done and the encouragement of nature's rebirth; the promise of God, eternal as the heavens and the presence of love real as the earth; and visions of flower and bush, robins and sky.

And it urges me to pass the wondering around so that might all grow newer and deeper in and beyond the season that awaits. So here are a few take-home questions to keep the turning close and personal.

*How is spring arriving in your life this time around?
Can you feel the joy of new birth rising?
Have you been hibernating way too long?
And now that it is so visible, can you help to spread the good news around?*

I ask these, as ever, of you and of me . . . in the Creative Power of God who splashes the sky with stars; in the Risen Presence of Jesus who is our best friend; and in the Holy Spirit of both comfort and surprise . . . today and forever. Amen.

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¹ William Sloane Coffin. Letters to a Young Doubter. Westminster John Knox Press, 2005, p. 165-6