

“The Poetry of Spring”

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First Church in Boston

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Part 1: “Snowdrops” by Louise Glück

I did not expect to survive, writes the poet.

Have you been there? I have.

Sometimes life is that bleak. But then you do survive. Life, fragile at first, starts to grow. Desolation and despair do not have the last word.

And yet, spring is not an exuberant tangle of full-growth blooms, plump tomatoes, and juicy watermelons like summer. Spring is the tender shoots pushing through cold soil that still freezes a bit at night. Spring is just a splash of green, the spot of purple beside the dead brown refuse of last year’s garden. Spring is a beginning. Spring is the assurance that life has not been defeated. It is the hopeful confirmation that yes, the gardens will grow again.

Sometimes hope is hard to hold on to. The cancer has come back. The depression won’t let go. The headlines are so persistently scary. Fear grips us. Like the bulb of the snowdrop suppressed in a frozen place, we too may feel as if this is the hopeless end.

And while sometimes endings do come. Other times, something happens. An opening begins. A new prescription starts to work. The mental fog breaks. The tests show a positive change. You notice the good news of an act of generosity, a story about the [astronauts](#) returning safely to earth.

Fear still lingers. The air is still cold. And, the poet dares us...“risk joy”.

“Risk joy in the raw wind of the new world.”

Could we try?

Part 2, “The Surprise of Spring” from *Name the Glory*, Molly M. Bennett

On March 29, 1968—fifty-seven years ago this Saturday, a fire destroyed First Church’s 1868 Gothic church building. A very unwelcome Spring “surprise.” Two days after the fire,

the congregation gathered across the street at the Lutheran Church for a Sunday afternoon service. Then Senior Minister, Rhys Williams preached a sermon entitled, ["As Spring Came."](#)

Everyone present that day would have passed by the ruins. I imagine the smell of smoke still hung in the air. Notably, Rev. Williams began his sermon not with the fire, but rather with a long litany of the many vital and growing activities of the church in recent years—including recently opening the Hale Chapel to outside groups. Only after naming these strengths does he directly address the loss of the fire. He describes receiving the terrifying phone call in the middle of the night, racing to the scene, his horror at the fierce destruction, and his relief in discovering that Park House next door with its precious content of historic church records would be safe. And then, he relates story after story of support from neighbors, from a *Globe* reporter who gave the first donation to rebuild, as well as from across the city and the nation. In closing, Rev. Williams acknowledges that rebuilding will be hard and will require new depths of faith, skills of communication, continued engagement with the wider community, and clarity about what is essential. On the essence of religion, Rev. Williams proclaimed:

For more than brick and mortar, we are people. We are a living church. We are the ones that decide whether a church is more than a past, more than rote present, but a challenging and leading spiritual force in the mainstream of a growing, creative part of humanity.

The building may have been in embers, but the ministry of the *people* remained. Yes!, the church will survive, Rev. Williams assured them. No fire can destroy what people working happily together can build. Returning to the theme of spring, he closes saying,

Where the stones have fallen, we will build with new brick. Where the beams lie charred, we will re-create with new timbers. Where the word is unspoken, we will build with new speech a church for us all, a work for us all, a chance for us all to participate with the ideal and with the divine. As spring came this year, the First Church in Boston and its members and friends see amidst the darkness a light leading to new vistas of beauty and service and love.

This is the message of Spring. The surprise of Life re-emerging. The world may still be cold and muddy. We may not always see the glory of the sun or the moon through the clouded sky. And, the children still play, chanting their songs of wonder. The animals give birth to their young. A new day begins. The coffee smells great.

The poet asks us to sing the glory of spring. "Speak if you cannot sing." Name the glory there all around us.

As most of you know undoubtedly know, part of the 1868 building remained from the fire and became incorporated into the new 1972 building we are in today. Our music director, Gigi, pointed out to me that etched into the original portico is a phrase from the Psalms saying, "Enter into his gates with thanksgiving..." As spring came in 1968, remarkably these words remained, calling the grieving congregation to name the glory of living in this world—even with its fire and loss.

Fifty-seven years later, we gather in a building that intentionally joins the old with the new. We gather within a structure that rose from the hopes and hard work of a *living church of people*. As spring comes in 2025, we face metaphorical fires within and beyond the walls of the church. You may also be facing destructive forces in your own life—the loss of a job, a fracturing relationship, health challenges. From the personal to the national and the global, there are real fires of destruction threatening the wellbeing of too many.

Some losses will be irrecoverable. And sometimes something happens. Possibilities surprise us. New life emerges. Can we risk opening ourselves to the raw wind of this moment? Can we try to name what we love—to name the glory of this gift of Life that no fire can destroy?

As spring comes, I pray that we find hope in Spring's renewal of Life. I pray that by coming together, we might remain a *living church* called to be a spiritual force for beauty and service and love. Our wider community needs this essential gift of religion. Each of us needs this faith in a Life and Love that cannot be destroyed by fear or fire.

So may it be. Amen.