

Dear Friends,

As I've been thinking about all of you, I thought about what beautiful days we were given last week. Whether we were out and about or hunkered down inside, the skies had just the right mixture of sunshine and textured cloud cover with pale blue behind it. The earliest spring wildflowers are beginning to open up in the Jimmy Neil Park behind the Storytelling Center. Deep purple hyacinths, delicate violets, brilliant white bloodroot, and periwinkle. (To my eye, periwinkle blooms have just a touch of laughter in their faces. But maybe that's just their name, *periwinkle*.) All these are now on display while the VA bluebells are just starting to break out of their pods and will soon swarm the hillsides of the park. This is one reason the Church has chosen to celebrate Easter in the spring. All around us, earth is breathing newness and promise. The Creation is regenerating and pushing back the winter.

That's easy for me to write. If only it were that easy for us all to feel right now.

The world, already racked with carelessness, apathy, violence, and injustice, now suffers an indiscriminate illness—a brand new mutation of a family of viruses that has been around for many, many years. It's frightening and real, but there is no one to blame or get angry at. Our response must look forward with determination, discipline, and hope because we're in this together for a long and difficult season of response on both global and local levels. It will not be easy, but our witness, which will outlast this pandemic, is that we live in the realm of God's great *Nevertheless*.

Nevertheless, we trust that come what may, God is alive in and through the power of resurrection. So, we trust. We sing praise and offer prayers. We help those who cannot help themselves. And we sit in awe at a Creation that will not be undone by our anxiety or even by death. Resilience is one of the daily miracles that keeps all of us going. And

while resilience can't stop the winter from coming, it does guarantee that the spring will also come.

In the meantime, stay put. Open your windows and let in the spring air. Join us for worship each Sunday which we will stream live at 11:00am EST. (Look for the link on our church website, <http://jpcusa.org>.) Know, too, that your session is working to keep our ministries active, vital, and relevant to all of us and to our community. We're in a whole new kind of spring right now. We're having to learn and do all kinds of new things. And even in the inevitable difficulties there is and will be new beauty.

Blessings and Peace,
Allen

Here are some signs of the spring:

Violets



Bloodroot



Trout lilies at Jacob's Park in Johnson City



Periwinkle (purple) and candytuft (white) in front of the Dishner house next to the church



Enjoy God's good creation wherever you are!

*For the beauty of the earth, for the beauty of the skies,
For the love which from our birth over and around us lies,
Lord of all, to thee we raise this our hymn of grateful praise*

*For the wonder of each hour of the day and of night,
Hill and vale and tree and flower, sun and moon and stars of light,
Lord of all, to thee we raise this our hymn of grateful praise*

*For the joy of ear and eye, for the heart and mind's delight,
For the mystic harmony, linking sense to sound and sight,
Lord of all, to thee we raise this our hymn of grateful praise*

*For the joy of human love, brother, sister, parent, child,
Friends on earth and friends above, for all gentle thoughts and mild,
Lord of all, to thee we raise this our hymn of grateful praise*

(Folliott S. Pierpoint, 1864)