

Spring's Blessing

One of the blessings of spring is the chance to get outside and look for the signs of new life that come with the warming weather. People closely connected to the land and tied to the rhythm of planting, tending, and harvest have this opportunity more readily than those who's world is dominated by concrete and asphalt. Perhaps that is why many city dwellers treasure their city parks which may be the closest they can get to a trip to the country.

I was at Bethany Seminary then the school was on the outskirts of Chicago. One spring, Bethany hosted the students from several seminaries located in the city for a meal and program on the Bethany campus. Bethany (and the Northern Baptist Seminary, Bethany had invited to share the property) were built on land that had been farm land not so long ago. By the time I was there, the seminary land was bordered by a freeway, shopping malls, business buildings, and a suburban neighborhood, but the campus itself was largely open land. There were trees, small lakes, a marsh, garden plots, the remnants of an orchard, and a grape arbor. There were also rabbits, groundhogs, a skunk or two, nesting Canadian geese, red wing black birds, a green heron who regularly fished in the lake by the chapel, and killdeer running around on their tiny legs. For many of the 'city students' who would visit us, it was a different world, and must have felt like being in the country.

The city students made a special day of their visit. They brought their families. They rented a double decker bus to make the trip to our campus; some even braving the chilly spring air to ride out on the bus's open upper deck. They were excited about their adventure. We Bethany folk soon learned that part of our hosting duties included 'country survival' lessons – ganders will chase you and peck you if you get too close to their nests; it is OK to walk (or run) in the grass as long as you look out for the 'gifts' geese leave behind; children did not have to confine their play to the small patches of grass between the sidewalks and the buildings like they had to stay on the 'playground' in the city; it was safe to enjoy the nature around you. There was some amusement in watching them learning these things that were second nature to us, but their visit was also a reminder that we should appreciate the little things about our surroundings we sometimes took for granted. The coming of our city guests was a gift to us if we took the time to see the pleasure and wonder they experienced in our little patch of God's earth. For them in was a respite from the city. For all of us, it was a respite from the rigors of study and a reminder that God's world is a varied and wondrous place.

May the coming of spring bring its gifts to us now – a much needed respite from confinement, suffering, and worry; a reminder of the gifts God surrounds us with; the pleasure to be found in caring for those gifts and sharing them with others; the delight of sharing our patch of God's earth with people who may come from a very different place but are no less excited by the adventure of living we all share.

This week, remember in prayer:

- **The victims of gun violence.** There has been a rash of incidents of gun violence in the U.S. during the last couple weeks. At least 623 shooting incidents have taken place in just the last 12 days. More than one person died in some of these. There have already been 8,777 gun deaths so far this year.
- **People dealing with COVID-19.** The number of vaccinated people is growing, & there is currently a decline in new cases. We pray that the pandemic may be easing. Help us not to back off on safety measures too soon. The future of this virus is still a work in process. There is still much we do not know about it.
- **Refugees & those displaced by violence** – especially during this pandemic, & especially the children.



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