

1. (oops!) Spring comes in fits and starts. My family took a vacation to Chicago in late March. By the time we pulled into our AirBnb, I realized I forgot my winter coat. I was able to get away with it wearing a couple sweatshirts, but that's not always guaranteed with March in the Midwest. (Three days record highs)

As we toured Chicago we ducked between frost and wind, but we even noticed some daffodil plants blooming in some of the few green spaces in Chicago. The last day of the vacation it was 70 degrees, the following Tuesday in Viroqua we almost cancelled Bible study because of a snowstorm.

Spring comes in fits and starts. Sometimes when those 70-degree days come, we treat them with skepticism. I'm not going to go outside because it's just going to be snowing two days from now! Besides, it's too windy and I didn't unpack my shorts. We read in Luke's Gospel that the women tell the disciples of the resurrection of Christ. **"But these words seemed to them an idle tale, and they did not believe them."** Perhaps in our skepticism we consider warm weather to be an idle tale, utter nonsense.

Dear Christian friends. Christ is risen! ... But if I may be so bold and open and honest, just like spring, 2. (ugh!) Easter comes in fits and starts. Let me use a story to illustrate this.

Circling back to my vacation, a highlight of our vacation was catching up with some family friends in Chicago whom I haven't seen since the pandemic. The fence to their apartment was decorated with pastel eggs, bright ribbons, and an Easter wreath with an Easter bunny. By all measures they are a joyful Christian family of five. But I couldn't help but notice hung up on a prominent spot a picture of their third child who is no longer with us, who didn't make it past birth. The sorrow of the child dying at childbirth threatens to deny the joy of those Easter decorations like a snowstorm in March threatens to deny the coming of spring.

Today is a joyous day. We have a packed house. We have joyous music. We have an Easter garden filled with beautiful flowers in many cases given in memory of Christian loved ones who departed in the faith. We'll have an Easter egg hunt for the little ones after worship.

But when we get into our cars and go home, and our last Easter guest leaves for the night, we crawl into bed and in the quiet moments we might wonder, “It’s cool that Jesus rose from the dead, but how does that help me?”

Because I’d much rather have my mom sitting next to my family in the pew than her resting in a grave in my hometown. That family of five in Chicago would much rather be a family of six. And if you scratch beneath the veneer of pastel eggs and easter bunnies, you too have stories of loss, sorrow, and grief that still keep you up at night. It would seem as though Easter comes in fits and starts, just like spring.

We’re only kidding ourselves if we say that flower buds springing up, birdsong, and occasional 70 degree days have nothing to do with spring and ultimately summer coming. Likewise, Jesus rising from the dead has everything to do with your resurrection and mine. Paul writes in our Epistle, **“But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive.”** 3. (aha!) The fits and starts promises the full bloom. In other words, **THE "SPRING" OF CHRIST'S RESURRECTION PROMISES THE "SUMMER" OF OURS.**

4. (whee!) The fits and starts prepare us for what's next. All throughout this sermon, I have been implying Easter is like spring, but I want to take a moment to reverse that. Spring is like Easter. The reality of Christ rising from the dead is more fundamental and more real than the seasons themselves.

Our God is the God of the living and not of the dead from our Triune God springs life itself even as the Lord breathed life into Adam’s nostrils. God created the heavens and the earth knowing they would all be cursed and fall into chaos as a result of Adam’s sin, yet He had a plan from the foundation of the world to send His Son to die and to rise.

Skeptics might say Christians invented Easter as an idle tale or myth that helps reflect the deeper reality of the rebirth of spring. The exact opposite is true. Our Heavenly Father created the season of spring

with its rebirth and new life to be training people to look for and expect Him to do the same thing in His Son Jesus Christ.

And so the million dollar question is, “If God is intent on restoring creation, why wait millennia?” “Why wait to raise mom?” “Why let calamity befall us?”

A sufficient answer to this is the stuff of dissertations, but I’ll give an answer by way of analogy. Yes, we may laugh with skepticism about unseasonable weather, but as the spring comes in fits and starts, it reminds us to get ready in fits and starts. Oh, I should sharpen my mower blade. Oh, I should lay down fertilizer. Oh, I guess I should really shop for a new swimsuit.

**“The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance.”** The first Easter is getting us ready for that second Easter, and He wants as many as possible to be ready to meet Jesus and welcome Him in faith.

In Luke’s Gospel, the first time resurrected Jesus appears to others is not in this passage, but when He walks with two disciples to Emmaus wherein He preaches to them on the way, and reveals Himself in the breaking of the bread.

We prepare for spring by cleaning our yards or buying summer attire. If the Evangelist Luke were here, He would tell us that we encounter the resurrected Christ not by putting up pastel eggs or easter bunny decorations, not even by visiting the tomb in Israel, but by the Lord physically coming to us in the Lord’s Supper with His real body and real blood which is no mere symbol or metaphor. He comes to us in the Word preached. Strengthened by this, we can see through the eyes of faith that we join the communion of saints at the altar rail both here and those who have gone before us in faith. My mother may not join us in the pew, but she joins me at the rail.

As we close out our sermon, let’s take a moment to reflect on the resurrection that is to come. 5. (yeah!) We'll hardly believe the joy of the "summer resurrection." For this, we will reflect on the Old Testament reading which foretells the second coming of Christ and the restored creation He will usher in.

**““For behold, I create new heavens and a new earth, and the former things shall not be remembered or come into mind. But be glad and rejoice forever in that which I create; for behold, I create Jerusalem to be a joy, and her people to be a gladness.”** In the summer, it’s hard to remember that we froze in the cold Midwestern winter. When Christ comes again to make a new heavens and a new earth, it’s not as though we will forget this former life, but the pain and sorrow will be a distant thing. We will be filled with joy.

**“I will rejoice in Jerusalem and be glad in my people; no more shall be heard in it the sound of weeping and the cry of distress. No more shall there be in it an infant who lives but a few days, or an old man who does not fill out his days, for the young man shall die a hundred years old, and the sinner a hundred years old shall be accursed.”** No more tears or distress. What’s more, no more will we have to bury infants who died seemingly before their time. Our Chicago friends will see their daughter again in the flesh with a resurrected body. I will embrace my mother again. We will be reunited with those who have Easter garden plants dedicated in their names.

Yes, spring in the Midwest comes in fits and starts. Yes, it may seem like Easter comes in fits and starts as it has been centuries since Jesus died, rose, and ascended to heaven, but our Christian hope is that Jesus’ resurrection has everything to do with yours and mine. In the face of death, calamity, and suffering, we know the rest of the story.

We don’t shovel snow the same way we do in April compared to January. Yes, we need to clear a path, but we know the snow will be melted in a few days. Dear Christian friends, we mourn the death of loved ones, but with the spring of Jesus’ resurrection, we don’t mourn the same way as unbelievers who think death is the end. Christ is risen!

Because of this fact, we know it will be just a little while before we see loved ones again, and we experience the summer of eternal life which has no end and surpasses our wildest dreams. Until then, we gather here with hope encountering the risen Christ through the eyes of faith.