



VOL. 2 ISSUE 4

# THE OASIS

Seasonal Journal of Southminster Presbyterian Church

## Oasis: A New Vision for a New Season

BY REV. MATT GEARKE

My first time going to youth group, my mother dragged me in kicking and screaming. I was in 6th grade and really didn't want to go. What I didn't realize at the time was how important this community and this space would become to me. I looked forward to going to youth group every Wednesday night. The church became a space where I discovered belonging, nurturing, affirmation and the power of being sent. And it drew me back week after week. Some of my closest friends to this day, I met in church. God shaped my worldview in profound ways through the nurturing of my mentors and pastors. The support I received from the congregation when I decided to go into the ministry was both affirming and empowering. For me, the church became a fertile, life giving space or oasis, where every week I found hope, healing and renewal.

In the Bible, after the Israelites crossed the Red Sea and escaped Egypt, God brought them after several days to Elim where it's likely they camped for over two months. Exodus says Elim was a fertile, life-giving place with 12 springs and 70 palm trees on the edge of the Desert of Sin. At Elim, the Israelites recovered from their escape from Egypt while preparing for their journey to the Promised Land. You can imagine the healing & renewing food, water and rest the Israelites found at Elim gave them hope for the journey ahead. For the Israelites, Elim also became an oasis. The world has changed a lot since Israel left Elim and I left youth group.

America is becoming less and less religious. iPhones, Google, Facebook and YouTube rule our lives. Despite being more connected than ever before, loneliness is rampant. Despite having access to unprecedented amounts of information, truth and meaning are harder to find. On top of all that we're in the midst of a global pandemic. I think we could use an oasis about now. Imagine if the church could be that oasis, and not just in our church building either? What if we could cultivate oasis' at home, at work, in our neighborhoods, and in our communities? Being an oasis by engaging and impacting people with God's hope wherever they are and wherever we are, is our new vision for a new season at SPC! And the best part is there is room for everyone at The Oasis!

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## Change is Inevitable

The word change normally refers to new beginnings. But the mystery of transformation more often happens not when something new begins, but when something old falls apart. The pain of something old falling apart—chaos—invites the soul to listen at a deeper level, and sometimes forces the soul to go to a new place. Most of us would never go to new places in any other way. The mystics use many words to describe this chaos: fire, dark night, death, emptiness, abandonment, trial, the Evil One. Whatever it is, it does not feel good and it does not feel like God.

We will normally do anything to keep the old thing from falling apart, yet this is when we need patience and guidance, and the freedom to let go instead of tightening our controls and certitudes. Perhaps Jesus is describing just this phenomenon when he says, “It is a narrow gate and a hard road that leads to life, and only a few find it” (Matthew 7:14). Not accidentally, he mentions this narrow road right after teaching the Golden Rule. He knows how much letting go it takes to “treat others as you would like them to treat you” (Matthew 7:12).

While change can force a transformation, spiritual transformation always includes a disconcerting reorientation. It can either help people to find new meaning or it can force people to close down and slowly turn bitter. The difference is determined precisely by the quality of our inner life, our practices, and our spirituality. Change happens, but transformation is always a process of letting go, living in the confusing, shadowy space for a while. Eventually, we are spit up on a new and unexpected shore. You can see why Jonah in the belly of the whale is such an important symbol for many Jews and Christians.

In moments of insecurity and crisis, shoulds and oughts don’t really help. They just increase the shame, guilt, pressure, and likelihood of backsliding into unhealthy patterns. It’s the deep yeses that carry us through to the other side. It’s that deeper something we are strongly for—such as equality and dignity for all—that allows us to wait it out. It’s someone in whom we absolutely believe and to whom we commit. In plain language, love wins out over guilt any day.

Adapted from Richard Rohr. *The Wisdom Pattern: Order, Disorder, Reorder* (Franciscan Media: 2020), 84–85.



## Reading Suggestions About New Beginnings

Max Lucado - "Begin Again: Your Hope and Renewal Start Today"

Richard Rohr - "The Wisdom Pattern: Order, Disorder, Reorder "

Tracy Chevalier - "The Last Runaway"

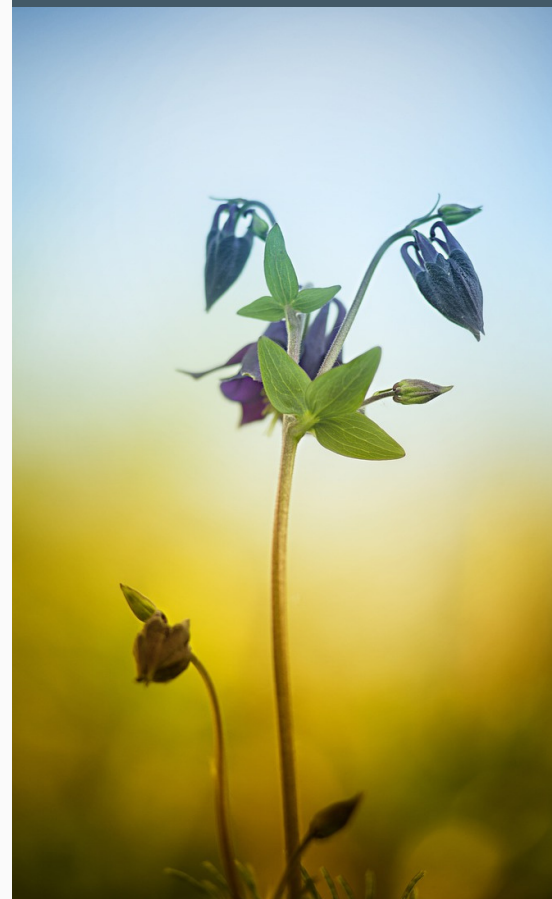
Susan Sygall - "No Ordinary Days"

For Children: Glenys Nellist - "Little Mole Finds Hope"

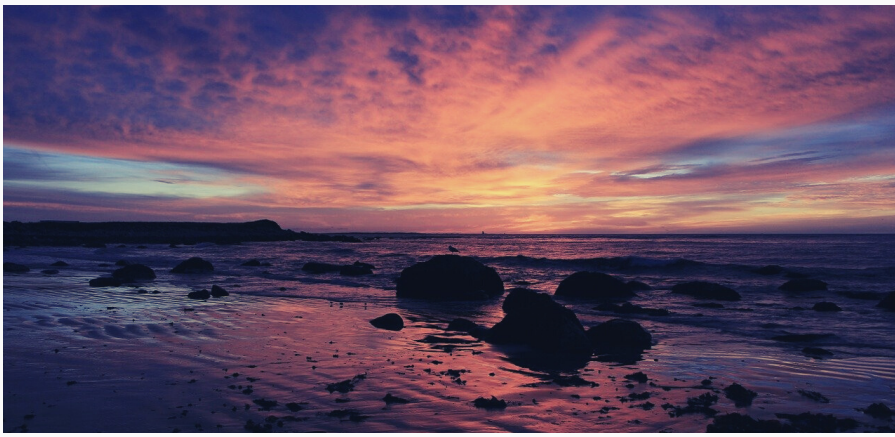
Lysa TerKeurst - "It Will Be Okay: Trusting God Through Fear and Change"

**“Remember finally,  
that the ashes that  
were on your  
forehead are created  
from the burnt palms  
of last Palm Sunday.  
New beginnings  
invariably come from  
old false things that  
are allowed to die.”**

RICHARD ROHR







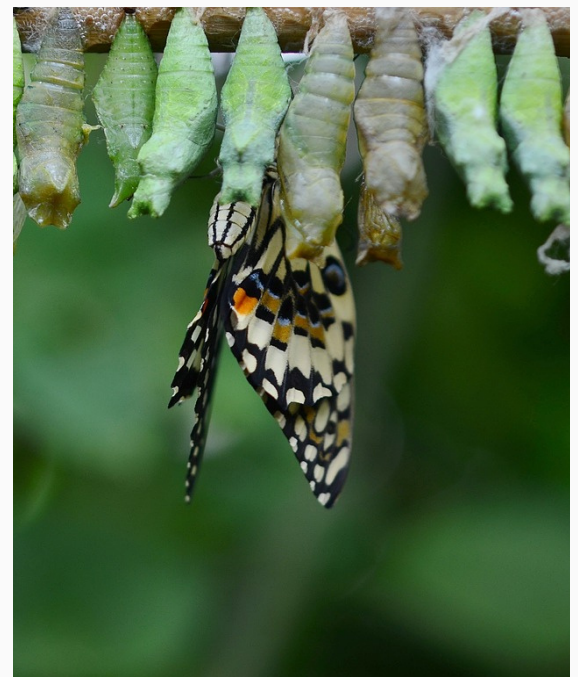
# Sunrise

BY SUE THOMSON

I love waking up  
when the world is still dark  
and I rush quickly to the water's edge.  
There I wait anxiously for the sun to rise.  
I can hear the waves ebbing and flowing.  
I sit in silence.  
It is so quiet,  
so peaceful.

Slowly,  
ever so slowly  
the sky begins to lighten.  
I say goodnight to the stars and the moon  
and wait patiently as the dawn approaches.  
I look up to see if there are any clouds,  
for that is when it is best.  
The sun reflects off the clouds  
and the sky becomes a painter's palette!  
The colors are spectacular  
and they steal my breath away!

Then suddenly the sun arrives,  
peeking out from the edge of the horizon.  
A ball of fire!  
So grand! So majestic!  
It is at that moment  
that I hear God's voice say,  
"I am so glad that you came today.  
I have been waiting for you!"



## Believe Your Trustworthy God

My dad decorated our den with a stump. I was just a kid at the time, eleven years old, maybe twelve. The perfect age to be fascinated with the idea of a tree stump sitting next to the fireplace. Over the fireplace, a clock. Next to the fireplace, fireplace tools. Next to the tools, a stump. Awesome. He came home from work with it one day. It took up the better portion of the bed of his pickup. That's where it lay when I first saw it. Dad pulled it out of his truck and let it fall onto the concrete driveway. "What is it, Dad?" "It's a tree stump," he answered with no small amount of pride.

Dad worked in the oil fields of West Texas. It was his job to make sure the pump machinery functioned smoothly. Apparently this tree trunk was interfering with his work. Quite honestly I don't remember why it troubled him. Perhaps it blocked his access to an engine. Maybe it leaned too far across a dirt path. Whatever the reason, it kept him from doing his work in the way that he wanted to do it. So he yanked it out of the ground. He wrapped one end of a chain around the trunk and the other end around his trailer hitch. The contest was over before it began. But dislodging the tree wasn't enough for him; he wanted to display it.....

Mom was less than enthused. As they stood on the driveway and exchanged animated opinions, I examined the bagged quarry. The trunk was as wide as my size twenty-nine waist. The bark had long since dried and was easy to peel away. Thumb-thick roots hung limp from the base. I've never considered myself a connoisseur of dead trees, but this much I knew: this trunk was a real beauty.

Over the years I've often reflected on my dad's decision to turn a trunk into décor, especially because I consider myself to be a tree trunk of my own making. When God found me, I was a fruitless stump with deep roots. I offered no beauty to the landscape of the world. No one found shade under my limbs. I even interfered with the work of the Father. Even so, he found a place for me. It required a good yank and no small amount of cleaning up, but he took me from the badlands to his home and displayed me as a work of his own. Such is the work of the Holy Spirit.

And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another.  
For this come from the Lord who is the Spirit. (2 Cor. 3:15 ESV)

The Spirit of God will transform you into a handiwork of heaven and display you in full view. Expect to be scrubbed, sanded, and varnished a time or two or ten. But in the end the result will be worth the discomfort. You'll be grateful.

Max Lucado, *Begin Again: Your Hope & Renewal Start Today* (Harper Collins: 2020), 1-3.



## Isaiah 43:19

BY REV. LIZ NICKERSON

Be alert, be present! This is a newer translation of one of my favorite passages, Isaiah 43:19. These are familiar words, but you probably have not read them translated in quite this way. These wise words, speak directly to our time. A year into the pandemic, signs of positive change are all around us. People are getting vaccinated; restrictions are being slowly lifted and we will carefully and cautiously start to resume our normal church activities in the coming months. It has been a really hard time, but it has also been a time of growth. We have all learned to Zoom, and members who have moved a few states away have been united with us in Adult Education classes.



During drive thru events, like our Love Your Neighbor Toiletry Drive, we collected over 1300 items for homeless clients at the night ministry. People beyond our church walls, and even beyond our country have been tuning in to worship! We have learned that the reach of SPC can stretch far beyond our physical walls and even our state. The pandemic has forced us to go big and go virtual, and we now have a much larger platform for ministry, than we ever thought possible. This would have never happened if it had not been for the pandemic. God is indeed doing a new thing. How can you be a part of it? What is God calling you to do in this new season? Let's each pray and ask God to show us the new thing he needs us to do. If you want to further explore the new things God is calling you to do in his name this spring, contact me about it. As Christians we are people of hope, and our hope is in Jesus Christ. The world needs our hope, so let's share it and challenge ourselves to do a new thing, in the name of Christ!

## Isaiah 43:19

**“Forget about what’s happened; don’t keep going over old history. Be alert, be present. I’m about to do something brand-new. It’s bursting out! Don’t you see it? There it is! I’m making a road through the desert, rivers in the badlands.”**

