

Spring, Part 1 by Parker Palmer

I will wax romantic about spring and its splendours in a moment, but first there is a hard truth to be told: before spring becomes beautiful, it is plug ugly, nothing but mud and muck. I have walked in the early spring through fields that will suck your boots off, a world so wet and woeful it makes you yearn for the return of ice. But in that muddy mess, the conditions for rebirth are being created.

I love the fact that the word “humus” – the decayed vegetable matter that feeds the roots of plants – comes from the same work root that gives rise to the word “humility.” It is a blessed etymology. It helps me understand that the humiliating events of life, the events that leave “mud on my face” or the “make my name mud,” may create the fertile soil in which something new can grow.

Though spring begins slowly and tentatively, it grows with a tenacity that never fails to touch me. The smallest and most tender shoots insist on having their way, coming up through ground that looked, only a few weeks earlier, as if it would never grow anything again. The crocuses and snowdrops do not bloom for long. But their mere appearance, however, brief, is always a harbinger of hope, and from those small beginnings, hope grows at a geometric rate. The days get longer, the winds get warmer, and the world grows green again.

In my own life, as my winters segue into spring, I not only find it hard to cope with mud but hard to credit the small harbingers of larger life to come, hard to hope until the outcome is secure. Spring teaches me to look more carefully for the green stems of possibility: for the intuitive hunch that may turn into a larger insight, for the glance or touch that may thaw a frozen relationship, for the stranger’s act of kindness that makes the world seem hospitable again.

Spring in its fullness is not easy to write about. Late spring is so flamboyant that it caricatures itself, which is why it has long been the province of poets with more passion than skill. But perhaps those poets have a point. Perhaps we are meant to yield to this flamboyance, to understand that life is not always to be measured and meted as winter compels us to do but to be spent from time to time in a riot of colour and growth.

Reflective questions:

How does this passage speak to you about your life experience?

Reflect on one of your most difficult (humiliating?) life moments. How did this hardship or struggles prepare you for the work you are doing now?

Is there a current “green stem of possibility” that you may not have noticed?