

Sermon for Mar 2026  
Verdandi's Spring  
Paying Attention

- Spring does not shout
  - Begins in whispers
    - Never arrives all at once
    - Does not arrive like a parade
    - It doesn't announce itself
  - Demands patience and close looking
    - nothing obvious yet
    - have to know what you're looking for
    - buds are barely swelling
    - different from the easy attention of June!
  - Spring seeps in
    - A softer wind
    - A longer afternoon
    - A shift in birdsong
  - Rewards the observer
    - Paying attention to the world's unfolding requires
      - practice
      - patience
      - willing to look at what's not fully formed yet
  - If we are not paying attention, we miss it
    - And missing it is not neutral
      - It changes how we live
    - What we pay attention to shapes who we become
- Demeter and Persephone
  - Persephone disappears, Demeter searches in grief
  - Land withers into Winter
    - because goddess of grain is not attending to it
  - Persephone returns, so does Demeter's attention
    - Spring!
- Lessons

- Seasonal cycles, grief, persistence
  - Also idea that attention, or its absence, shapes the world
  - The earth itself responds to attention and loss
- Norns
  - At the roots of the world tree, Yggdrasil, three beings tend the Well of Wyrð
    - Similarity to Greek Fates, but
      - Fate is woven, stitched in
      - Wyrð is poured, swirled together
    - Urðr remembers what *has* been
    - Skuld considers what *might* be
    - Verdandi watches what *is becoming*
      - what is taking shape right now
  - Verdandi does not reminisce nor predict
    - She observes
    - She sees even slight ripples in the well
      - The subtle shift in direction
      - The way one choice alters the pattern
    - She knows that what is becoming is not inevitable
      - but responsive
    - She pays attention
  - Early Spring is Verdandi's season
    - Not because it *has* arrived
      - but because it *is* arriving
        - Buds swelling
        - Soil loosening
        - Light/warmth returning
      - Nothing dramatic
      - Everything underway
  - Tying to recent sermons
    - Resistance is Urðr; about what *has* happened
    - Resilience is about Skuld, what *may* come
    - Attention is about Verdandi, what *is becoming*
      - not the past
      - not the future

- the present participle
    - Not just “is”
    - But “*is becoming*”
    - Verdandi’s name implies motion
- Process Emergence
  - Verdandi inspires us to pay attention to
    - What is forming right now
    - What patterns are coalescing beneath the surface
  - Represents the instability and possibility of the present
- Dichotomies
  - Past vs future
  - Winter vs Summer
  - Collapse vs renewal
  - Verdandi: life is lived in ongoing act of becoming
  - Not either/or, but a process theology
    - Spring is not a date
      - It is a process
    - Justice is not an event
      - It is a process
    - Community is not a static thing
      - It is a process
- Verdandi embodies attention
  - Reality that we are co-creating the present
  - Present is not fixed
    - Still pliable
    - Not yet hardened into the past
- Paying attention
  - If we don't notice *becoming*
    - Resistance happens too late
    - Resilience weakens
  - Paying attention invites us to notice
    - The early signs of authoritarianism
      - before it hardens
    - The early signs of burnout
      - before it collapses

- The early signs of hope
    - before it blossoms
  - Three Norns
    - sit at the roots of the world
    - cannot attend to the present without
      - understanding the past
        - how did we get here?
      - imagining the future
        - what are we creating?
    - Verdandi watches what is becoming
      - It's not whether change is coming
        - It is already underway
      - It's whether we're paying attention
        - while it is still becoming
    - Paying attention to current events
      - reading the patterns as they form
- Janus (Roman)
  - the two-faced god of thresholds and transitions
    - one face watches the world's events
    - one watches snowdrops push through frozen ground
  - Both gazes are necessary
- Simone Weil's (20th century philosopher) theology of attention
  - attention is not concentration or effort
    - it's receptive waiting, a clearing of the self so reality can arrive
  - purest form of prayer
    - both political witness and watching crocuses
- Sacred practice
  - Pagan: attention is reverence
    - Watching the moon cycle
    - Tracking solstices and equinoxes
    - Honoring the subtle shifts in season
    - Listening to land and ancestors
  - UU: attention is covenantal
    - Agreeing to be present to one another

- Agreeing to witness suffering
  - Agreeing to notice injustice
  - Paying attention is how we stay in right relationship
- Paying attention is:
  - less about believing something
  - more about noticing what is
  - refusal to sleepwalk
  - refusal to be numbed
  - refusal to look away
- But it's also:
  - refusal to despair
  - refusal to miss joy
  - refusal to miss what Nature is doing quietly
- Paying attention in difficult times
  - Resistance requires strength
  - Resilience requires endurance
    - Both require attention
  - Not paying attention means
    - Being manipulated
    - Being distracted
    - Being overwhelmed into passivity
      - Constant attention to crisis can erode resilience
        - Doom-scrolling not same as moral clarity!
  - Attention is power
    - What we are encouraged to focus on is not accidental
    - Outrage competes for our nervous systems
      - Fear keeps us reactive
      - Distraction keeps us fragmented
    - Awareness of manipulation
      - Who benefits if we are
        - distracted?
        - exhausted?
    - Paying deliberate attention is an act of autonomy
    - Choosing what we notice is a form of resistance
    - Noticing beauty is not escapism

- it is remembering what we are fighting for
  - Paying attention means
    - Staying informed without being consumed
    - Naming injustice without letting it define the whole story
    - Refusing both apathy and panic
  - Resistance is grounded in clear seeing
  - Resilience requires attention to what is growing
  - Spring becomes a spiritual anchor
    - While systems strain, while headlines flash
      - Earth continues slow renewal
        - Seeds split open underground
        - Sap rises in trees long before leaves appear
        - Life prepares itself quietly
    - Shifting attention to nature is not denial
      - It is noticing that life persists
  - Attention widens our field of vision beyond crisis
- Philosophical
  - Hannah Arendt (20th century philosopher)
    - thinking as a withdrawal from the world in order to return to it more clearly
    - solitude and observation as preparation for civic engagement, not escape from it
- Neurological
  - Attention Restoration Theory
    - Nature restores our directed attention capacity
      - The kind needed to follow difficult news
      - Time in natural settings literally replenishes our ability to engage with difficult things
    - watching birds is a form of civic preparation, not avoidance
- Circles of attention
  - Attention to the Self
    - Am I exhausted?
    - Am I hardening?
    - Am I losing tenderness?

- *Resilience without inward attention becomes burnout*
  - Attention to the World
    - Injustice
    - Policy
    - Vulnerable neighbors
    - Shifts in culture
    - *Resistance lives here*
  - Attention to the Community
    - Who is tired?
    - Who is frightened?
    - Who is carrying too much?
    - Who is grieving?
    - Who is quietly stepping up?
    - Who needs to be invited in?
    - Who is tending something small but vital?
    - What beginnings are we overlooking because they are not dramatic?
    - *Resilience grows here*
  - Attention to the Living Earth
    - Light returning
    - Soil softening
    - Birds reappearing
    - Water moving again
    - *Hope is rooted here*
- The cost of not paying attention
  - When we fail to notice:
    - Harm goes unchecked
    - Burnout sneaks in
    - Relationships fray
    - Spring passes by without joy
  - Attention keeps us in rhythm
- Idunn and the Apples
  - In Asgard, gods were strong, radiant, seemingly invincible
    - But their vitality did not come from their power
    - It came from something much quieter

- A goddess named Idunn kept a basket of apples
  - Not flashy—just apples
  - But gods ate them, remained young and strong
  - Through trickery and distraction, Idunn was lured away
    - taken to the realm of Jotun
  - At first, gods did not notice
  - But slowly, they began to age
    - Wrinkles formed
    - Strength faded
    - Energy drained
    - Panic set in
  - Then they realized what they'd lost
    - Understood what had sustained them all along
      - They mounted a rescue
      - They brought Idunn back
      - The apples were restored
      - Vitality returned
  - But the lesson remained
  - Nearly lost their resilience
    - not through battle
    - but through inattention
- Resilience depends on guarding what sustains us
  - Attention to what nourishes us
  - Neglect leads to decay
- Restoration requires awareness and effort
- Thoughts
  - What are the “apples” in our community?
  - What quiet practices sustain us?
  - What relationships keep us resilient?
  - What signs of renewal are we failing to guard?
- Reminder: Spring does not shout
  - Neither does a basket of apples
    - But without them, the gods withered
- Finding Balance
  - Unbalanced attention

- Numbing: comes from overwhelming
      - too much news, doomscrolling, despair
    - Bypassing: comes from retreating into beauty to avoid responsibility
  - Spiritual practice is holding both
    - Finding balance
      - remaining present to the difficult *and* the beautiful
    - both happening right now, in Verdandi's hands
- Closing
  - The Norns in Verdandi's eyes
    - Resistance calls us to pay attention not only to what has broken, but what is breaking
    - Resilience calls us to pay attention to what will endure, but what is enduring
    - Springtime calls us to pay attention to what is becoming
  - The world is loud. The headlines are urgent
  - But Spring waits to be noticed
    - Beneath it all, something is unfolding
      - Light is lengthening
      - Ground is softening
      - Life is returning
  - May we be people who
    - notice
    - move past distraction
    - stay awake, refuse to sleepwalk through the season
    - pay attention
      - to what is breaking
      - to what is healing
      - to ourselves
      - to one another
      - to the turning earth
      - to the quiet beginnings already underway

- Practice of deliberate noticing
  - In the week to come:
    - Each day, notice one sign of seasonal change
      - Step outside at the same time each day and notice what's different from yesterday
    - When you feel a strong reaction to news or an event, pause and ask: what is this feeling telling me that I actually believe?
    - In one conversation this week, resist the urge to respond immediately — let a silence sit for three full seconds before speaking
    - Spend five quiet minutes simply observing
      - without fixing, judging, or planning