

December 31, 2023, 11 a.m.

“Springing Up”

*Based on Isaiah 61:11, adapted.*

*The earth will bring forth its shoots and a garden will cause what is sown in it to spring up.*

*In the midst of hate, writes the existential French author Albert Camus, I found there was, within me, an invincible love. In the midst of tears, he continues, I found there was, within me, an invincible smile. In the midst of chaos, he says, I found there was, within me, an invincible calm. And in the midst of winter, he concludes, I found there was, within me, an invincible summer.*

We are, my friends, in the midst of winter. We spent an entire month preparing for this with stories of how various animals bed down for the season. Stories that teach us how to adapt to the dark and cold in ingenious ways, trusting the God who comes, even in the darkest night, to bring us a new beginning.

Through those stories, Black Bear taught us how to *let go* and *go limp*, shrinking into our own bodies, at the exact same time new life grows within us while we slumber. Wood Frog taught us to practice becoming a block of ice in order to survive: *extreme tolerance* as scientists say, cheating death of its ruin and instead taking it in and transforming it. Striped Skunk taught us the glory of getting fat and sharing our space with our siblings, snuggling tight in community because our survival depends on it. Lake Trout taught us to find our way home, to instill a sense of place for the next generation, and to trust what is dormant to emerge from its cold-water cradle just when the time is right.

The prophet Isaiah teaches us the same: *the earth WILL bring forth its shoots and a garden WILL cause what is sown in it to spring up.* In the same ways, Isaiah says, our entire community will flourish, even if we only see glimpses of that flourishing today.

A Jubilee will occur, Isaiah insists. Comforting all who mourn with garlands and a mantle of praise. Ancient ruins will be built up, ruined cities will be prepared, oak trees will be planted in the devastated places.

Therefore, we are bold to rejoice, even in the midst of winter. Because love, smiles, calm, and summer are still springing up, as Christ is born, Immanuel, God With Us.

[Sharing communal stories of life springing up in our midst]