

“Blessings in the Seasons of Our Lives”

Ecclesiastes 3: 1 – 8

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And we all, most of us, know the communal song we are humming under our breath at this very moment, right?

“To everything (turn, turn, turn)

There is a season (turn, turn, turn)

And a time to every purpose, under heaven...”

That hit song from the group....(the Byrds) and ...can anyone guess the year? (1965).

The original text, the scripture read this morning, dates more than a few hundred years before the Byrd’s hit record, somewhere around 400 years before the birth of Jesus. The author of the text was first thought to be Solomon but that has been proven incorrect. We don’t know much about the author, in Hebrew called ‘Qohelet’ which in Greek is Ecclesiastes, meaning ‘the preacher’. Philosopher or sage may be a label for his writings, under the category of ‘wisdom literature’ in the Bible, are more philosophical musing than religious teachings. And not just philosophical musing but cynical, skeptical – many would vote that it’s the most skeptical book in the Bible. And maybe rightly so, for he does draw a seemingly pretty dire conclusion in his writing; that life is vanity, translated to mean, meaningless; ‘meaningless, meaningless, life is meaningless – a striving after wind’. So how did the writers of this worship series on blessings choose this guy’s words for today’s text? Good question! Perhaps as we journey through the seasons we will find an answer. We begin with Spring, and a poem from Jan Richardson’s book of Celtic Blessings: Welcome Spring

Long nights and cold days,
Fallow fields and dormant trees,
A journey of the inner world.

I open my eyes and see light.
Warmth breaking through,
Promise of new life

Coming out of death.
Resurrection.
Welcome, beauty.
Welcome, buds.
Welcome, newness.
Inside and all around me.

You, God, source of hope,
Source of healing,
Source of life.
Welcome, Welcome.

Make your home in me. (p. 49, 'Christ Beside Me, Christ Within Me: Celtic Blessings)

Spring! That time when newness fills our earth's hemisphere, a season synonymous with birth, with new life, resurrection and it is so very easy to consider our many blessings as we walk in these days. And in these days of our lives as well; often comparing it to our days of childhood or youth; the beginning years of our lives. But as we live our days we realize that there are many Spring seasons, not just in the calendar year but in our life's journeying; times of new starts, new beginnings, resurrection happenings. There are Spring seasons of our faith, of our congregational life as well; when a Spirit of new life takes hold. Blessings in the seasons of our lives – now I know you sufferers of Spring allergies may disagree, but blessings abound in the Spring seasons and we throw off our winter coats and winter's weight and dance our thanksgivings to God for Spring!

Pages of the calendar turn, the earth moves, time does not stand still but wanders into summer, with a poem by Marge Piercy titled "More Than Enough":

The first lily of June opens its mouth.
All over the sand road where we walk
multiflora rose climbs trees cascading
white or pink blossoms, simple, intense
the scent drifting like colored mist.
The arrowhead is spreading its creamy
clumps of flowers and the blackberries
are blooming in the thickets. Season of
joy for the bee. The green will never
again, be so green, so purely and lushly
new, grass lifting its wheaty seed heads

into the wind. Rich fresh wine
of June, we stagger into you smeared
with pollen, overcome as the turtle
laying her eggs in roadside sand.

Summer, that time in the calendar year when things take off, when growth appears; in our lives we may think of this time of early adulthood, having stepped out in the Spring newness of our lives to now settle into growing; a family, a career, our identity, our faith. Summer seasons are filled with farmers' markets abundance, and life's fullness, so heaping is our basket of blessings, that we sometimes don't even have time, or make time to pause, to recognize and be filled with gratitude for the steady growth that has occurred; in our lives, in our thinking, in our spiritual journeying.

On to Fall with the poem "Autumn Magic" by Jeanne Fiedler

Fall
The season of wisdom
where we attain
colors of great knowledge
and darker shades of fear
The confusing temperatures
One Spring Day
One Winter,
balanced back and forth
to shock us into
temperance and equanimity
The sun is majestic
as it glares through
the vibrant shades
of windblown leaves
as they leave their
colorful hues
on the bare shuffling
ground
As we endure the beauty
We can see the long
permanence of impermanence
Like life and death
from transience to eternity

God's gifts of cooler days and less humidity, brilliant colors, longer nights which may lend toward more reflection. Someone once said that Fall is the time when, if we only have eyes to see, the leaves teach us how to gracefully let go.

If we begin our calendar seasonal year with Spring, then the season of Fall is the half way point, we can say that, in the seasons of our lives fall may be midlife. A time of learning how to let go of some of what may have defined you in the past. As Ken and I step into our empty nest days, this certainly hits home. Our culture, which places emphasis on youth and defines this period as the beginning days of decline perhaps makes it harder to see the blessings. Anne Morrow Lindbergh, in her book "Gift from the Sea", points to the gifts of this season, writing, "Is it not possible that middle age can be looked upon as a period of second flowering, second growth? Of a new stage in living when, having shed many of the physical struggles, the worldly ambitions, the material encumbrances of active life, one might be free to fulfil the neglected side of one's self? Free for growth of mind, heart and talent: free at last for spiritual growth?"

Winter: Text from Vivaldi's Four Seasons

To tremble from cold in the icy snow,
In the harsh breath of a horrid wind;
To run, stamping one's feet every moment,
Our teeth chattering in the extreme cold
Before the fire to pass peaceful,
contented days while the rain outside pours down.
We tread the icy path slowly
and cautiously,
for fear of tripping and falling.
We feel the chill north winds
course through the home
despite the locked and bolted
doors...
this is winter, which
nonetheless
brings its own delights.

Finding blessings in winter's days is for me not easy. I am not a fan of extreme cold, dark days, barren landscapes. Ah, but then there are warm winter fires, hymns of Advent and Christmas, and the promise that light shines in the darkness. Winter's season of our life parallels with our final years and we approach with fear

and trepidation as we do snow and ice, forgetting the blessings of the warmth of memories of a life well lived, songs in our lives that have defined us, and the knowledge that God's light continues to shine even in the bleakest of times. Just as the other seasons, we can experience winter in any time of our lives; when newness and growth have been replaced with barrenness and absence of growth. During those times, may we hang on to the blessings of winter's days; a time that lends itself to quiet, rest, knowing that new life is forming within even though we may not be able to see it.

Which brings us back to our friend, Ecclesiastes. To everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven. His conclusion that just as the natural world changes, our lives too change whether we like it or not. Our struggle to have it otherwise is meaningless. Still, in the end he affirms that life with its limitations is worth living, and calls us to enjoy the goodness of our days. Taking us full circle in this series; to be mindful of the presence of the holy in each part of our day, in the very ordinary stuff of life, in all of life.

Which reminds me of an ancient story:

The disciple asked, 'Where shall I look for enlightenment?'

"Here," the wise one said.

"When will it happen?" the disciple asked.

"It is happening right now," the wise one answered.

"Then why don't I experience it?"

"Because you don't look."

"What should I look for?"

"Nothing. Just look."

"Look at what?"

"At anything your eyes light on."

"But must I look in a special way?"

“No, the ordinary way will do.”

“But don’t I always look the ordinary way?”

“No, you don’t.”

“But why ever not?”

“Because to look, you must be here. And you are mostly somewhere else.”

And so, we are able to pray as in ancient Celtic prayers, “Blest to me all that is life, the fullness of life, each of my days, this day. Blest to me Spring. Blest to me Summer. Blest to me Fall. Blest to me Winter. Blest to me all of the seasons of my life, each of my seasons, this season. May we have eyes to see.

Amen