

Sermon for Season Creation – September 15, 2019

Church of Reconciliation, San Antonio

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Winter: Celebrating Its Delights, *Honoring Our Roots*

Today, my friends, we are invited into the Winter season. And just as Ella Fitzgerald invited us into a reflection on Summertime, I invite you now to take a deep breath and listen as Antonio Vivaldi's concerto takes you into the experience of Winter...

Vivaldi's Winter...

A description of this concerto reads:

We tread the icy path slowly and cautiously, for fear of tripping and falling. Then turning abruptly, slip, crash on the ground and, rising, hasten on across the ice lest it cracks. 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.

As you listened to Vivaldi's concerto, what feelings were evoked in you? I know that as Erica and I listened to it, trying to decide when to fade the sound, my pulse immediately rose as I heard the beginning sounds as a musical backdrop to a Hitchcock or Spielberg movie warning me that some danger was lurking around the corner. And it is true. Not only can that be true in the season of Winter, it certainly is true in a wintry season in our own lives. We can be afraid of tripping and falling whether it be on the ice, or in a particularly difficult time of grieving or disappointment, or in a season of feeling lost amidst the circumstances in our lives over which we have no control.

Yet just as in the notes on Vivaldi's concerto, the season of winter "nonetheless brings its own delights."

It is the already and the not yet ... experience in our lives which can so often bring upon us a sense of urgency or impending danger that grips our heart and can, if we allow it, hold us hostage. The truth is that in all times and seasons of our lives we always have choices.

In his brilliant and powerful book, ***Let Your Life Speak: Listening for the Voice of Vocation***, Quaker writer, teacher and activist, Parker Palmer writes:

True vocation joins self and service, as Frederick Buechner asserts when he

*defines vocation as “the place where your deep gladness meets the world’s deep need.” Buechner’s definition starts with the self and moves toward the needs of the world: it begins, wisely, where vocation begins- not in what the world needs (which is everything), but in the nature of the human self, in what brings the self, joy, the deep knowing that we are here on earth to be the gifts that God created. ... As I learn more about the seed of true self that was planted when I was born, I also learn about the ecosystem in which I was planted – the network of communal relationships in which I am called to live responsively, accountably, and joyfully with beings of every sort. Only when I know seed **and** system, self **and** community, can I embody the great commandment to love both my neighbor and myself.*

How true! Wouldn’t you agree? In order to love, really love one’s neighbors, one must first practice knowing and loving oneself truly and deeply, in ways authentic to the Divine’s invitation to be exactly who we were each created to be. It takes practice and it’s always hard, hard work.

Wisely, Palmer goes on to explore how we get to the place of self and vocation which most often takes every one of us through (what he calls) a “long journey through alien lands.” He further describes this journey in terms of a spiritual pilgrimage, “a transformative journey to a sacred center” full of hardships, darkness and peril. And in the tradition of pilgrimage, “those hardships are seen not as accidental but as integral to the journey itself.”

This transformative journey of hunkering down and coming to know oneself deeply, truthfully, authentically is the work we are given to do in this season of transition. Who are we? Whose are we? How are we called to be Church of Reconciliation in the world at this very moment? Who is being called by the Divine to be a companion on this pilgrimage of faith? This pilgrimage will undoubtedly take us to places we have not yet explored, and experiences we have not dared to dream possible. What a gift!

On Monday, I started to pray my way into this season of Winter and my own experiences with the season. I simply sat and let flow out from my spirit, the words describing my memories and experiences of this season of life. Words came flowing out: the smell of baked apples with cinnamon and hot chocolate waiting for me and my sisters as we came home from school, crackling fires, seeing my breath in the cold air rise up before me, ice skating, falling down and getting up again, snowball fights, and snow angels, twinkling lights reflected

through softly falling snowflakes, sledding down a long hill, aching bones from snow shoveling, ice-covered limbs of trees shimmering in light... An east coast flow of memories...

It's interesting to know that although days are shorter and nights, longer, paradoxically, the Earth is actually closest to the sun between January 3-5 but it feels colder because the Earth herself, is tilted away from the sun. So, maybe in the spiritual season of winter as we tilt away from the Son...

Which brings me back to Vivaldi's concerto on Winter... Even in the urgency of violins with bows sweeping across the strings, there is such beauty to behold. Such beauty right beneath the surface of things. The kind of awesome beauty that compels us to peer **under** the surface of things, even to peer into the dark places where life continues to flourish. This, my friends, is Winter... no matter where one lives and this is the winter of our spiritual lives which, in fact, no one ever escapes.

We are reminded of this in a powerful way by our Gospel text where we encounter Jesus on the cross. The scene is set for us, "When it was noon, darkness came over the whole land..." At a time, unforeseen, darkness descended. And in the midst of the darkness we hear Jesus himself cry out, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" Words that are not unfamiliar to me... words that I have echoed in wintry seasons of my own life, words that speak the truth. Those words issuing from Jesus' own heart, gives me encouragement, even urges me to speak the truth to God in whatever season of life I find myself.

We see how others react to Jesus' primal cry to God... they mock him. And make some kind of cosmic joke about his pain. Not so different, really, than the world in which we live. Yet there is beauty even in this horrific scene, as the Centurion comes to faith with the words, "Truly this man was God's Son!" This Centurion claims his faith in Jesus, a grace and gift given, and born out of the salvific pain of this one moment.

We, you and I, know the rest of the story. Jesus' life did not end once and for all on that Good Friday, as he hung on the cross and breathed his last. The glorious beauty and miraculous gift of the Resurrection was yet unfolding even in the very moment of his last earthly breath.

So, too, it is for us. In the midst of the pain, there is our God, joined with us in every inhalation and exhalation. There, in the midst of whatever haunts us or terrifies us, there is our God, in holy communion with us, revealing the life that is still unfolding before us, even if we cannot see it ourselves.

Just as in the Winter season, our temptation is to hunker down, withdraw, and isolate ourselves, God invites us out into the beauty of the season... to notice the stars in the wintery sky, the snow angels making their way toward us, the shimmering lights and the very breath we exhale rising up before us.

All of these are signs of life to come... life to be lived and for which to be grateful even in the season of winter.

Palmer writes of winter in these words:

Winter is a demanding season- and not everyone appreciates its discipline. ... and the rigors of winter... are accompanied by amazing gifts. One gift is beauty... another, is the reminder that times of dormancy and deep rest are essential to all living things. Despite all appearances, of course, Nature is not dead in winter- it has gone underground to renew itself and prepare for spring. ... But for me, winter has an evengreater gift to give... It is the gift of utter clarity. In winter, one can walk into woods and now see the trees clearly, singly, and together, and see the ground they are rooted in.

My friends, today we seek such utter clarity here as we “Honor our Roots”... as we return to the roots of our Anglican/Episcopal tradition and actually hold the Book of Common Prayer in our very hands. As you hold this book, **feel** the presence of those saints who have gone before and held that prayer book perhaps making a prayer for those who were still to come... for you, for me.

Who are we, now? And for whom do we pray? What are those roots you wish to honor in your own families, circles of friendship? What are those roots that you and I honor by choosing this church as our spiritual home?

Palmer ends his reflection on winter with these words:

In the upper Midwest, newcomers often receive a classic piece of wintertime advice:

“The winters will drive you crazy until you learn to get out into them.” ... Our inward winters take many forms- failure, betrayal, depression, death. But every one of them, in my experience, yields to the same advice: “The winters will drive you crazy until you learn to get out into them.” ... By walking directly into such a season ... we discover once again that the cycle of the seasons is trustworthy and life-giving, even in what seems the most dismaying season of all.”

Such is the gift of our Gospel today. That even at the foot of the cross, there is new faith to be discovered. And to remember that the season of new life, everlasting life, Resurrection life is ***always*** unfolding before each and everyone of us.

As in the notes on Vivaldi's Winter concerto,

This is winter... which nonetheless brings its own delights. Amen.