

Ash Wednesday
Spiritual Rhythms
March 5, 2014

This sermon was preached by Pastor Kurt Jacobson at Trinity Lutheran Church Eau Claire WI

Ecclesiastes 3: 1-8

3 There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under the heavens
2 a time to be born and a time to die, a time to plant and a time to uproot,
3 a time to kill and a time to heal, a time to tear down and a time to build,
4 a time to weep and a time to laugh, a time to mourn and a time to dance,
5 a time to scatter stones and a time to gather them, a time to embrace and a time to refrain
from embracing,
6 a time to search and a time to give up, a time to keep and a time to throw away,
7 a time to tear and a time to mend, a time to be silent and a time to speak,
8 a time to love and a time to hate, a time for war and a time for peace. (NIV)

A confession most of my 55 years I've ignored this, that all is seasonal. Maybe, at times I've not even believed it. For *everything* there is a season. For everything? In the natural world, that's obvious the earth moves in seasonal rhythm

Light, dark

Cold, hot

Plant, harvest

Fruitfulness, barrenness

The earth's rhythms are self-evident.

But the writer of Ecclesiastes talks about another seasonality, seasons that define not the earth's rhythms, but life's seasons.

Love, hate

Weeping, laughing

Mourning, dancing

Living, dying.

This series is about four distinct seasons – not like we have in earth's rhythms, but rather seasons within us. In the next five Wednesdays, this series will explore the seasons of our hearts. Using earth's seasons of winter, spring, summer, fall as a way of organizing, we'll consider spiritual rhythms in our lives by exploring the seasons of the heart. One quick item we won't be equating seasons of earth to our lives. We won't be corresponding spring, summer, fall and

winter to the stages of life where youth is spring, early adulthood summer, middle-age fall, and old age winter.

The reality is our hearts have seasons and they're always changing. Seasons of the heart are no respecters of age. I've met teenagers who are dour and withdrawn and octogenarians who are playful and whimsical.

The other reality is the seasons of our hearts sometimes have no rhyme or reason; there's nothing to predict or prevent any particular season or another. Yet sometimes there are unavoidable events that drive our hearts into seasons faster than lightning can slice the night sky.

Our hearts already know seasons. This series aims to get our brains aware of the seasons of our heart. And in getting our brains in touch with seasons of the heart – I think you'll find that your awareness of God is going to grow.

Here's a truth: Your heart knows a lot. It knows seasons. Your heart knows the spring of expectant joy; it knows summer-like playfulness. Your heart knows winter – the quiet loneliness, sometimes chilling bleakness. Your heart knows all the seasons – but does your mind? And what difference does it make to bring your brain into the seasons of the heart?

Sometimes we have a say in the seasons of our heart and we can direct it. Just as farmers plow in one season, plant in another, irrigate in another, harvest in another and let the fields lie fallow in yet another, so there are things we can do and refrain from doing that fit our hearts' seasons.

The danger is we often ignore the seasons of our heart – and we lose touch with God who is present in all of the heart's seasons. God is easily known in the springtime of the heart. But God is also present in that dark, cold season of the heart's winter.

In preparing for this series, I learned something about myself. Until recently I didn't have a way of understanding the seasons of my heart. I could tell you my heart was heavy or wondering but I didn't know how to connect it to a spirituality that helped me understand.

So, in thinking of the seasons of the heart – likening them to the seasons of the year is helpful. We all adapt our habits and actions to the seasons of earth. In spring I tend to my lawn. In summer I try to play more and enjoy the outdoors. In fall I get serious about tasks that need to be done before it gets cold again. So I pull out the snowblower and make sure it starts. In winter, I wear boots and stay inside and read more books. In each season there are rhythms to certain activities and behaviors. But I had no equivalent ways of adapting my spiritual life – my praying and worshiping, my being with God, with others, with self – to the season shifts inside me – in my heart.

Yet, like you, my heart has always known the seasons. Now that my brain is learning this – I can look back and understand seasons of my heart. I now understand how the death by suicide of someone close to me in my early years as a pastor in your midst drove my heart in the bleakness of winter all through earth's summer of 1992. Back then I didn't have a way to explain the bleakness and loneliness of the heart's winter. I could watch everyone around me seemed to have hearts of summer – evidenced with joy and playfulness. If I knew then what I've come to understand about seasons of the heart now, I think I would have done some things differently – and I would have had a clearer spiritual awareness of God's presence in that long winter.

During the Wednesdays of Lent, using the earth's four seasons, we're going to explore Spiritual rhythms. We want this series to offer you spiritual growth and increasing connection with God. There are two purposes in knowing the seasons of the heart and they both aim to grasp

1 Christ's presence in every season of the heart; to know that even in the darkness or barren like times of life, He is present there, too;

2 Christ's wisdom, to know how to use his wisdom to tend to our heart's seasons and in doing so grow in faith and love for neighbor in their seasons of the heart.

Back to the bible reading about seasons: After the writer of Ecclesiastes says that for everything there is a season, he remarks about eternity "He has made everything beautiful in its time. He has also set eternity in the human heart; yet no one can fathom what God has done from beginning to end."v9-11 .

These two thoughts are joined – for everything there is a season, beautiful in its time, and God has set eternity in our hearts. There's good news my friends. Eternity hides beneath the appearance of each season. In some seasons of the heart we delight, and in others we just hope to survive. But all the seasons are only a dress rehearsal for what your heart really wants and that's heaven.

The bible tells us God sets eternity in our hearts, and it tells us not to despair or be over-captivated by the beauty of the seasons of this life. For though at times in our lives, we just want the burden lifted or the beauty prolonged, God has an infinitely better idea that the God for All Seasons, the Lord, would walk with us in every season, and then, when all is done, take us home. Heaven. Eternity. Beauty forever.

So, please, come along with my pastoral colleagues and I this Lenten season – each Wednesday and explore the spiritual rhythms – in the seasons of your heart.