

“Balancing (or Not) the Seasons of the Heart”

Spiritual Rhythms

Lent Midweek 6

April 9, 2014

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

Reading Introduction

This series “Spiritual Rhythms” has aimed to provide spiritual growth for our lives AS WELL as a greater awareness of God’s presence in all the seasons of the heart. In previous weeks we’ve looked at the heart in the season of winter, spring, summer and fall. And now today we bring it all together to find a Spiritual Rhythm for living in all the seasons.

For this final installment in the series we pose the question of BALANCE. Is there balance between the seasons of the heart? Should we expect there to be an equal amount of summer’s joys to balance winter’s isolation and quiet loneliness?

Well, to be true to the title of this series – we’re going to seek to find spiritual rhythm rather than balance as we live through all the seasons of the heart.

To get some wise help in finding that spiritual rhythm we turn to Jesus and a reading from Matthew chapter 6. Countering all the tasks and pursuits that we chase in our lives – to the point of becoming weary of it all from time to time– Jesus’s directions to “**strive first for the kingdom of God**” is the starting point to understanding spiritual rhythm. Let’s listen to what Jesus has to say:

Matthew 6: Therefore do not worry, saying, “What will we eat?” or “What will we drink?” or “What will we wear?” For it is the Gentiles who strive for all these things; and indeed your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. But strive first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.

Dear Friends:

Well, after an excruciatingly long and challenging winter season – spring is emerging. Lovely isn’t it! With zealous dispatch, we are all thrilled to see the change and fully anticipating spring giving way to the warmth summer, which we know goes by too quickly.

Seasons are inherently unbalanced. There’s little need to convince any of us, who have endured the recent winter season, that there is no balance between winter and summer here in Wisconsin. The same is true in the seasons of our lives and hearts.

Is it fair to say we don’t like imbalance? We live in a society that has cherished myths about balance. At some time or another, we all seek balance – that magical combination of rest and play and work, time for others and time for self that, once found, will make life simple, elegant, easy: balanced.

But truth be told, there is no balance in life. There are only seasons for everything, as the biblical writer told us long ago, and seasons are inherently unbalanced. Thus, I want to toss out the idea of the goal of balance and insert the goal of rhythm. Rhythm in life – for life – it’s much better than balance.

I have a kayak up at the lake and enjoy the activity and perspective that I get while paddling around in it. If you’ve ever been in a kayak, you know it takes some balance to get in and out of it. But to get around in a kayak, you need rhythm in paddling. Without rhythm, you won’t get to where you want to go.

The same is true in life. While many people think they should have balance between work and home life and the like, what we really need is rhythm. If you want to develop good rhythm in living you make a choice --- choosing what it is you will spend your time and energy on or in more stark words “what you’re going to weary yourself on.” I know that sounds odd – but stick with me for a minute here and I’ll try to make this understandable.

Like I said at the start, seasons are inherently unbalanced. When we busy ourselves trying to achieve a balanced life, we chase a false hope. Yet we all know people who think that with just enough money and free time, good health and a happy family, one can arrive at some ideal state of existence = balance.

But such striving is wearying – and we never get there. Why? Because something always gets in the way of that ideal state of balance. And the fall-out from wearying ourselves in striving for balance is life disconnected - often from key people and certainly from God.

Remember Jesus’ words in the reading a bit ago? He said “Don’t worry about your life... instead strive first for the kingdom of God.”

Cancel the pursuit of balance and instead choose to achieve rhythm And to do that you have to choose what and for whom you’re going to spend your time and energy. Think of it as the direction of your tilt. Or lives are always tilted toward something, so choose to make it a worthwhile direction - strive first for the kingdom of heaven – you’ll find your life and your heart in spiritual rhythm.

Consider this for example when it comes to choosing what to weary yourself and whom to weary ourselves for in the pursuit of good rhythm for life. I call it “*Life in the season of raising children.*” Many of you are well familiar with this season. Some of you are past those years and some of you are watching others in this season. I’ve listened to enough people in the season of raising children speak of balance. They ask “What can I do to balance the challenge of having time for all the tasks and also some time for self, for renewal, for rest?”

Mark Buchanan leads parent groups on this top and he’s often asked the question “How can I have any balance when I’m so busy in the season of child rearing? Buchanan says, “Jesus has a great example to share on this topic.” Then he brings up the story from Matthew 18: 1-7* where Jesus’ followers are bickering over greatness in God’s kingdom. These are folks wearying themselves, not for balance, but to be chosen as the greatest in Jesus’ estimation.

So what does Jesus do? He has a little child stand among the people bickering over greatness in God’s kingdom. And then he says three things about that child:

- 1 -the kingdom belongs to this child and those like her,
- 2 we must become like her to enter the kingdom and
- 3 we’ll never see the kingdom – if we do anything to hurt her, or any child, for that matter.

That’s a lot of kingdom tied up in the life of one child!

Then Buchanan asks the parent looking for tips on balance in the season of child raising:

“What your name?”

“Gary.”

“Hi Gary. What’s your wife’s name?”

“Lisa.”

“Gary, I take it that you and Lisa are in the season of raising children.”

“Yes.”

“Getting much sleep?”

“Not much.

“How many children do you have?”

“Four.”

“What are their ages.”

“Nine, seven, three and eight months.”

“Oh! Girls? Boys?”

“The oldest and youngest are girls. The two middle ones, boys.”

“What are their names?”

“The oldest is Daphne, followed by Braedon, Byron, and baby Madeline.”

***Speaking their names, Gary’s voice thickens with emotion.*

“You love them a lot, don’t you?”

Gary nods, too overcome to speak.

“It’s just as Jesus would have it, Gary: that your heart is wide open and easily accessed and quickly stirred by just the names of your own children coming out of your mouth.”

“How amazing, Gary. Little Madeline – can’t talk, walk, is just starting to sit up and crawl – and like Jesus’ example of the little child, the kingdom belongs to her. Your primary task right now, is to see and receive God’s kingdom through her, and to imitate her rhythm in living so it becomes second nature, you do it without thinking about it. Gary, the kingdom is in your midst. It’s there with Madeline. It’s there with your boys and Daphne. Be where they are, and find spiritual rhythm in living in the midst of them.

“And isn’t that, at least in part what rhythm in the season of child raising is? Such living isn’t balanced. It’s gloriously lopsided. It calls for choosing the right weariness and seeing in it all spiritual rhythm.

What season do you find yourself in? Lean into whatever season you find yourself in right now. When you’re young and in the spring of life, do something wildly adventurous and grow from it. When your children are young, lean into the playful and wearying rhythm of life with them. When you’re fifty-ish, sixty-ish, and moving into the fall of life, say yes to every young person who wants your time. When you’re older and in the winter of life’s seasons, worship God with all that’s in you and even if it takes your last breath, speak blessing on the next generation.

Spiritual rhythm – of the seasons of life and the heart are always moving. On that basis, I recommend we abandon the dream of balance. Striving and living for the kingdom of God permits us no such magical poise and perfect balance in this life. The kingdom of God, since the time of Jesus, has been tirelessly advancing, and billions of people through the ages have wearied themselves for it. In doing so, they've moved it forward generation after generation. Be one of them.

Seek first the kingdom of God. Weary your life on it -- and find spiritual rhythm in all the seasons of life and heart.

***Matthew 18: 1-7** At that time the disciples came to Jesus and asked, 'Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?' 2He called a child, whom he put among them, 3and said, 'Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. 4Whoever becomes humble like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. 5Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me. 'If any of you put a stumbling-block before one of these little ones who believe in me, it would be better for you if a great millstone were fastened around your neck and you were drowned in the depth of the sea.