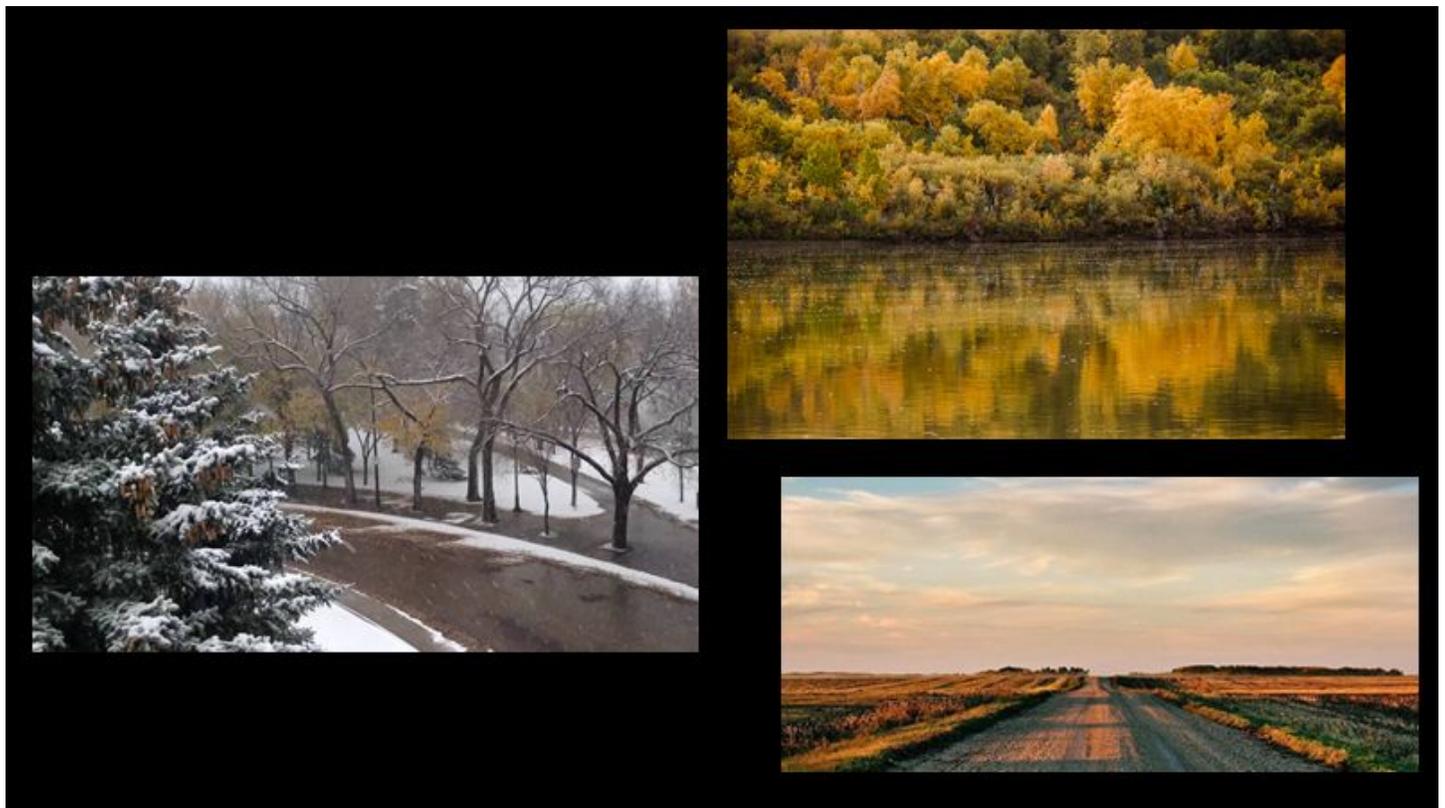


To everything there is a season, and a time to every purpose under heaven

(Turn, Turn, Turn... <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xVOJla2vYx8>)

What season are we in? Technically, the answer is Fall, or Autumn, if you prefer. But this is up for debate, in my house at least. Nate usually insists that it's winter, because it's cold outside. Sarita agreed with him when the first snow came, but now that it's gone she prefers to push the argument that it still feels like summer when the sun is shining. Keri has chosen the diplomatic approach, with repeated explanations that fall is the season that includes a little bit of summer and a little bit of winter. Personally, I prefer to deny the existence of this thing called winter until it's actually here.



Fall is a transitional season. Physically and physiologically, the days are getting shorter, the light is getting weaker. Last weekend I was hanging out with some friends, and someone looked at the clock and said “wow, it’s only 8:30, it feels like 11!” And we joked about how old we must be getting, etc... which may be true, but really, of course it feels later. The sun is going down four hours earlier than it did just a few months ago. Tiredness is a normal physiological response to the season. We can go inside and turn the lights on, but our bodies still respond to the darkness. It’s a season of change.

It's also a season of change in our society, in our personal lives. Whether you're back to school or back from summer holidays or finishing up those projects you didn't get to in the summer or beginning to get ready for the holiday season, our society has declared that fall is a "time to get things done." It's a season of busy-ness. And with all of that comes increased pressure on schedules and families and relationships, so that little things become big things and tensions rise. Or maybe you see all of this and are reminded of your limitations, how you're lonely or bored or somehow unable to take part in this rush of activity that everyone else seems to be engaged in.

In this season of change, are we paying attention to what's happening inside of us? That's the question I want us to consider this morning. Because the stuff happening outside of us and around us does impact us on the inside, whether we're connected to it or not, whether we're aware of it or not. Just as we respond physiologically to the changing light and temperature of the season, the changes of the season also impact us emotionally, and mentally, and spiritually.

How are you feeling? How is your heart? How is your mental health? What are you thinking about? What are you obsessing over? How is your spirit? Where is God for you in this season?

This morning I want to invite you to explore your inner life in this season. I have some thoughts about some general categories of changes that come with this season of fall, and after I share each of those we'll take a couple of minutes to reflect on how you're experiencing that aspect of the season.

One common experience is of Fall as season of fullness. Many cultures celebrate fall with a harvest festival, a time to recognize the bounty brought forth from the earth. The work of planting and tending and harvesting has again sustained us, our work has again born fruit that will meet our needs. Even though most of us don't depend on our own literal sowing and reaping, we still celebrate Thanksgiving as this time to take stock of the goodness in our lives, the fullness of life that is brought to us through many other hands.

The ancient Jewish harvest festival is called “Sukkot” (Sue-cot), the Festival of Tabernacles. In this tradition, God’s People built temporary shelters out of branches and leaves, and lived in them for seven days of celebration. In addition to naming the bounty of harvest, this was a reminder of the Exodus journey, how God brought their ancestors out of slavery to live in the desert.

The fragile shelters both remind of God’s faithfulness and also our dependence. The goodness that we experience is not earned or deserved; we plant and water and harvest, but the growth and fruit that comes is beyond us. In this season of fullness, we are grateful and also generous because this goodness does not belong to us.

And so Fall is a time to look back, to remember God’s faithfulness in the season behind us, that we might remember to trust in the seasons ahead.



A Season of... fullness

- ~ When have you felt “full” in this season?
- ~ What signs of God’s provision and goodness have you seen?
- ~ When have you relied on God or practiced trust in this season?
- ~ What would you include in a prayer of gratitude for this season?

As you consider those questions, we’re going to sing “You Are All We Have.” It’s a simple song, but if you need the words it’s in the green book, #29. I’ll play it through a couple of times as we reflect.

“You are all we have, you give us what we need. Our lives are in your hands, O Lord, our lives are in your hands.”

One of the little things I enjoy about the fall is finding clusters of ladybugs in my backyard. They like my pile of scrap lumber for some reason, or sometimes they'll line up along a piece of siding or under a gutter or whatever. Google says that they gather in warm places for mating and hibernation in the fall, that when one of them finds a sheltered spot it releases a pheromone that attracts others to the spot. It's amazing to me how they can survive minus 40 winters, but they do. Last winter a bunch of them took shelter under the cover of our little plastic sandbox. So when the snow melted in late March, we pulled the cover off and there they were, looking quite pleased with life in their little biodome. Unfortunately, though they survived the winter not all of them survived the toddler that found them...

Fall is a season of preparation. Nature knows what's coming, and takes shelter, fattens up, or heads south as fast as it can. We civilized humans prepare as well, putting away our summer toys, digging out winter gear and snow shovels, cleaning out gutters and stocking our shelves and emergency kits. And let's be honest, we do more than a bit of our own fattening up and heading south as well. :)

What does it mean to spiritually prepare for a new season? That might mean a literal season, as winter comes with lots of emotionally-charged opportunities - holidays, family pressures, extended times of darkness and being stuck indoors. Those things impact our spirits. There are also opportunities for making meaning and doing the work of the church, from worship seasons like Advent and Lent to "church business" with its budgets and congregational meetings. How are we preparing spiritually for the winter ahead of us?

Or maybe the new season is more personal, as one part of your life ends and something new begins--career changes, adding a new member to a family, or saying goodbye to those who have died or moved away, a shift in your abilities as you age, or changing circumstances that bring new opportunities and challenges.

We often can't control those changes, but we can prepare for them, paying attention to what we're thinking and feeling. There are a lot of parallels between physical preparations and internal preparations. In both, we can take stock of supplies and

gathering resources, prepare places and relationships that bring warmth and comfort, giving ourselves space and time to rest and recover.

Again, some questions to reflect on as we sing:



A Season of... preparation

- ~ What are you preparing for, consciously or unconsciously?
- ~ Where do you feel... hope? fear? dread? unprepared?
- ~ What resources do you need? Where will you turn for companionship, safety and rest?
- ~ What do you need God to be for you in the coming season?

Fall is also a season of letting go. It's in the name itself, in the spring we rise to the life and growth of summer, and on this side we fall towards the death of winter. To be all melodramatic about it. :) I do think for many of us, there is a sense of downward motion to this season, settling in, coming down to earth.

The obvious natural parallel is trees losing their leaves. The life is still there, but it's turned inward and held onto tightly. There can be beauty in that, but it's still a loss, as growth stops and life shifts to survival mode. Sometimes that's what change does to us, stuns us and shuts us down in loss and grief. We'll talk about that more in a couple of weeks as we recognize Eternity Sunday on November 20. Loss can be excruciatingly difficult, and the massive transformation from the vibrant summer to the monochrome winter that happens in fall bears witness to great cost of letting go.

But the promise is that every loss also brings opportunities for new life and new hope. The gospel of John chapter 12:

Very truly, I tell you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. Those who cling to their life lose it, and those who renounce their life in this world will keep it for eternal life.

This is the potential of Fall--even as the last fruits of one season are harvested, the beginnings of the next season are already underway. When we're shifting between seasons of life, if we cling too tightly to the way things used to be, we'll miss the growth of the new season.



A Season of... letting go

- ~ What do/will you miss about the past season? What are you eager to leave behind? What pieces will you carry with you?
- ~ What burdens has the past season put on you? Is it time to put down any of those, and what will that take?
- ~ What gift(s) God might be giving to you through this transition?

One more common experience of Fall is called "liminality." That is a new word for me. It literally means threshold, on the doorstep, not all the way in, but clearly not out, either. Mystics might call it the time-between-times, or a "thin place."

Seasonally, Fall isn't really its own thing, it's really defined by the seasons that come before and after it--try to explain fall without comparing it to winter or

summer. But it's also more than just the combination of the two, we don't just blend smoothly from summer to winter. Fall is a space of transition, of unpredictability, of wild swings from one extreme to another. We're not quite sure when winter will get here, so we wait and take each day as it comes.

The uncertainty of liminal spaces can be a dangerous thing. My neighbourhood is home to several large rabbits (that eat more things from our garden than we do)... In the summer, they're a nice brown color that blends right in with the dead grass of our lawn. And in the winter, they're literally white as snow. But right now, they're in the process of changing colors, half brown and half white. And so they're really easy to spot on the bare ground, which is a dangerous thing for a snack-sized animal on the prairies. In the wild, at least. The rabbits in our neighbourhood just flaunt the lack of natural predators by walking down the middle of the street...

That's what it can be like to be in a liminal space. One season has run its course, but the new one has not yet begun. Or maybe the new season has begun but you're still wearing your coat from the last one. And so you're uncertain, vulnerable, maybe bored or unsure of what your purpose is, feeling the tension of the pull of the familiar past but unable to move forward into whatever comes next.

A liminal space can be unsettling. Most of us try to limit them, to hold onto the old season as long as we possibly can or to rush into the new season as quickly as we can.

But if we let it, the space between seasons can be spaces of transformation and healing. They provide unique opportunities--to be between seasons allows a certain freedom, space to rest and recover, space to study and learn, space to reflect on seasons past and set new priorities for the times ahead. The biblical narrative speaks often of wilderness experiences, where the hero leaves or is forced to leave life for a while to spend time in the desert or on the mountain. And whether they're looking or not, God shows up in the wilderness, offering a challenge or a gift or some other way of preparing them for the next phase of their life.

Maybe this season can be that kind of liminal space for you, if you are willing to embrace it.



A Season of... liminality, “the space between”

- ~ What seasons are you in between? How do you feel about the transition(s)?
- ~ What do you need to survive the time of change? To thrive?
- ~ What opportunities are present, for rest, for reflection, for growth?
- ~ Where do you feel God in this space? Where do you need God to be?

Fullness, Preparation, Letting Go, and Liminality. Those are some of the opportunities of the fall season.

I hope that this has raised some things that you'd like to explore further. I'd suggest going outside sometime this week to experience some of the season of fall in person, perhaps going for a walk by yourself or with a friend. If you'd like to explore these questions further, I have printed them onto cards that you can take as you leave.

Jan Richardson, "A Blessing for Travelling in the Dark" in *Circle of Grace* p30-31

www.paintedprayerbook.com



"A Blessing for
Travelling in the Dark"

~ Jan Richardson

Go slow
if you can.
Slower.
More slowly still.
Friendly dark
or fearsome,
this is no place
to break your neck
by rushing,
by running,
by crashing into
what you cannot see



Then again,
it is true:
different darks
have different tasks,
and if you
have arrived here unawares,
if you have come
in peril
or in pain,
this might be no place
you should dawdle.





I do not know
what these shadows
ask of you,
what they might hold
that means you good
or ill.
It is not for me
to reckon
whether you should linger
or you should leave.



But this is what
I can ask for you:

That in the darkness
there be a blessing.
That in the shadows
there be a welcome.
That in the night
you be encompassed
by the Love that knows
your name.

