

SEASONS...AND SEEDS

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What season are you in? (I know. It's summer! But let me explain.)

Let Your Life Speak is a little book by Parker Palmer. It's in my personal Top Ten books about then spiritual life. Originally, it wasn't even a book. Each chapter of its 109 pages was an essay, written for some other publication. One day a friend said, "Parker, you've got a book here!" And what a book! I recommend it to anyone who asks essential questions about the spiritual life and their sense of vocation - God's call to them. In Parker's own words, *Let Your Life Speak* seeks to be "a coherent exploration of a subject that engages many of us for the better part of our lives."

Let Your Life Speak ends with a dynamic chapter called "There is a Season." My question to you, one I like to ask often - "What season are you in?" - was inspired by this essay. Parker begins:

"Throughout this book, I have looked at selfhood and vocation through metaphorical lenses, from the 'seed' of true self that is planted in the world at our birth, to the 'journey' we take through darkness toward the light. I end with yet another metaphor, looking at selfhood and vocation through the turning of the seasons.

"Seasons," Parker says, "is a wise metaphor for the movement of life. It suggests life is neither a 'battlefield' nor a 'game of chance' but something infinitely richer, more promising, more real. The notion that our lives are like the eternal cycle of the seasons does not deny the struggle or the joy, the loss or the gain, the darkness or the light, but encourages us to embrace it all - and to find in all of it opportunities for growth."

Speaking of those opportunities, I love the story my wife Eyleen tells about a spiritual director who would listen to her talk about her struggles, losses and darkness, then rub his hands together and with a gleam in his eye say, "Ah, yes: another opportunity for spiritual growth!" To which she or you or I might reply, "Easy for YOU to say! You don't have to live it!!"

I ask you again: what season are you in? Are you *wintering* through a dormant time of your life? Do you need more "r & r" - more rest and renewal - these days? Or are you stuck in the muck and mire of *Spring*, with 'mud on your face', struggling to see the harbingers of hope?

Maybe you're just green with *Summer*, swimming around in all this abundant growth, learning how community is also really good biology. Or, perhaps, you've already stumbled into *Fall*, delighting in all the colors, while sowing seeds in autumn's decline.

We're now officially in the church's green season, sometimes called "Ordinary Time." But here at St. Matthew's there's an extra-ordinary twist. What may feel like a now-ordinary season of transition is about to change. After fourteen months, in the midst of summer, I'm leaving Louisville. In a few weeks, I'll go home to Memphis. Before you know it, a new rector will arrive and settle in - here, with you. A new rector for your new, ordinary and extraordinary season of life and ministry together. How exciting!

Speaking of ordinary and extraordinary, Jesus taught in parables - like the one today about the sower, the seeds and the soil. Parables were his metaphorical stories about the human spiritual journey and the divine mystery of God. Jesus used ordinary images from everyday life - yeast, coins, weeds. One scholar (C. H. Dodd) says parables "tease the mind into active thought." Another (Sally McFague) says Jesus IS the parable of God. So, why wouldn't Jesus, the ultimate mind-teaser, use parables to tease out something of the metaphorical mystery of God - the God who is always beyond our understanding, the God who moves us out of our comfort zone?

My favorite season has always been Fall. Crisp, crunchy apples. Heat and humidity *finally* diminishing. In just a month, it will be back to school, the end of summer's slower pace. Parker's perspective on the Fall? "My delight in the autumn colors is always tinged with melancholy, a sense of impending loss that is only heightened by the beauty all around. I am drawn down by the prospect of death more than I am lifted up by the hope of new life. But as I explore autumn's paradox of dying and seeding, I feel the power of metaphor...if I look more deeply, I may see the myriad possibilities being planted to bear fruit in some season yet to come.

"In retrospect, I can see in my own life what I could not see at the time - how the job I lost (or never got) helped me find work I needed to do, how the "road closed" sign turned me toward terrain I needed to travel, how losses that felt irredeemable forced me to discern meanings I needed to know. On the surface, it seemed that life was lessening, but silently and lavishly, the seeds of new life were always being sown" (*LYLS*, pp. 98-99).

Today's parable of soil, sower and seeds is interpreted by Jesus. He took the time to explain to his disciples just what this parable meant for them in their own day. The eight verses missing from today's Gospel passage is where he assures them that the crowds see but do not see and hear but do not understand. "But blessed are your eyes," Jesus told those faithful followers, "for they see, and your ears, for they hear" (13:13, 17).

Sometimes a preacher will pick up where Jesus left off and suggest we, like those disciples, need to be *good* soil. But farmers in Jesus' day cast the seed, and then, they plowed - a more scattershot approach. This means some seed simply fell on not-so-good soil. The sower, then, is an image for the One who sows indiscriminately. It's not a business model, where you find the good soil and only throw seeds there. It's not a scarcity model. It's a model of abundance. It's a parabolic model. It's God's model.

Today, I have another interpretation. What if the seeds are *us*? With a scarcity mindset, we might think: OK, I'm a seed. But what if we are more? What if our God of abundance sows *each* of us as many seeds? What if some part of us, at some point in our lives, falls fortunately on good soil, and that's where we really thrive? And...what if some part of us, sooner or later, also falls on rocky or thorny ground, or even on the path, where we get beaten down? Might it be that in each

life, some seed will fall badly? Might it be that the lessons we are given to learn come to us more painfully and powerfully when we are NOT sown in rich, beautiful soil? Might it be that, as Parker Palmer puts it, when life seems to be lessening, it is THEN...silently, lavishly...that seeds of new life are actually being sown?

That notion resonated deep within me this week. In fact, my muse spoke to me, demanding: *How can you keep from singing?* And so...

*Silently, lavishly - God has been sowing; sowing in you and in me.
Seeds of new life that are hidden, yet growing -
growing in you and in me.*

*Seeds sown, seeds sown: We are abundant seeds sown!
Silently, lavishly - God is still sowing;
sowing in you and in me.*

Read/download a booklet with Parker Palmer's essay [From Language to Life](#).