

Sunday July 28, 2019

Sacred Earth, Sacred Worth - The Paths of Life

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Psalm 30

Composer, Pete Seeger in the early 60's wrote a song that is legendary. Actually it was legendary before Seeger wrote it because the text is found in the book of Ecclesiastes and speaks of a time for every season and every purpose under heaven. I am certain you know what song I am referring to:

**To everything -Turn, turn, turn
There is a season -Turn, turn, turn
And a time to every purpose under Heaven
A time to be born, a time to die
A time to plant, a time to reap
A time to kill, a time to heal
A time to laugh, a time to weep**

Indeed there are many seasons to our days of life on earth. Each season of life we travel a path that makes us who we are body, mind and soul. In each season there is a time for every purpose under heaven and by your presence here today, I suspect you are seeking a greater connection with God in this journey we call life on earth. The spiritual journey can be understood as a moving in and out of paths, each path with their own gifts. These cycles of life are born out of the seasons of the planet and remind us that there is a time for everything and that fluctuations of the spirit are part of being human. The one constant in all of this movement is that God is found in each of those seasons for there is a time for every purpose under heaven.

Matthew Fox an American priest and theologian, embraced a movement that came to be known as Creation Spirituality, early on in his spiritual journey. It is not only about the environment and ecology but also knowing deeply our own beloved nature and learning to live out of a belief in our original Blessing, not our original sin. He asks us to seek what a difference it makes to live with this joyful outlook and want goodness for all peoples and the world we inhabit. Wonder is at the heart of creation spirituality. Wonder at the vastness of creation as well as the closeness of God. It is a beautiful interpretation of the Christ Story for we know that Jesus came that we might have life and live that life abundantly!

The four paths that Fox suggests we journey on tell us what matters. Each path is honored for the gifts that are received at that particular juncture on our lives. Each path brings us to greater understanding and relationship with God the creator of all things!

Path 1 is the path of the *positive* and our sign post is *that we are to love at least three times a day*. What matters most and what we delight in on this path is the awe, wonder and mystery of all beings, each of whom is the "word of God", a "mirror of God that glistens and glitters" as Hildegard of Bingen put it this way, *"Each day we have the capacity to fall in love with a million*

things in our world." Last week as we sought renewal in the Adirondack's, this was made real in nature that surrounded us. I was awed by the stars, of which there are 200 billion in our galaxy alone. I was awed by the wildflowers in full blossom, of which there are at least 10,000 on our planet. I was awed by the heron and the hawk that fly over the pond each morning and evening in search of food for sustenance. I was awed by the joy of having our sons join for a day of recreation with a few of their friends, as stories were shared and games played to everyone's delight. I loved waking each morning and refreshing my spirit with a cup of coffee, morning prayer and the smooth waters of the pond that reflect the mountains beauty.

Path 2 is the path of the *negative* and our sign post is that *we shall dare the dark*. Meister Eckhart says that "the ground of the soul is darkness." We enter the shadow, the hidden parts of ourselves and our society, so we can confront the cover-up that often accompanies evil in our self or society. In entering the darkness we let go of the cover-up and denial. Despair and apathy, bitterness and cynicism are a result of covering up and only by entering the darkness can we let go of the resentment created in the deepest part of our being. You have heard folks speak about the "dark night of the soul". You may have experienced such a night yourself: The death of a loved one, the diagnosis of an illness, the loss of employment or a relationship. Entering the dark is necessary if we are to move beyond the despair and numbness. Fox shares, "A return to the dark is a return to our origins, we were all conceived in the dark, lived our first 9 months in the dark." Part of the darkness we sometimes find ourselves in, is the absence of words and images and the presence of silence. Silence beckons us from the dark. It is not a comfortable place to be but God is there. Tony Evans said, "When God is silent, God is not still. God does some of God's best work in the dark. Trust God, God is there."

A time to build up, a time to break down

A time to dance, a time to mourn

A time to cast away stones

A time to gather stones together

To everything - Turn, turn, turn

There is a season - Turn, turn, turn

And a time to every purpose under Heaven

Path 3 is the path *of creativity and imagination*. Our sign post on this path is *to dare to give birth!* All 4 paths find their climax in creativity. We create only out of what we have beheld in light and darkness. Creativity is not about painting a picture or producing an object; it is about wrestling with demons and angels in the depths of our being. We are sons and daughters, heirs of the creative power of God. We cannot deny God's creative power in us. When we do so we diminish God.

Our culture often intimidates us when it comes to becoming the creators we are meant to be. I hear many youth, say "I can't do it! I can't do that!" We are created in the image of God and we are called to give birth to the God in each of us and enter God the creator's world!

Consider for a moment these words found in Joan Chittister's book, *The Monastery of the Heart: An Invitation to a Meaningful Life*. She writes, "In our twenty-first century view of life—through the lens of the Rule of Benedict—we know now in new ways that the earth and all its fruits are not for our exploitation, they are for our care. We are co-creators with God of what creation has left unfinished. What has been left in embryo is left for us to develop. What can be developed God trusts us to bring to full potential. But not for ourselves alone. Co-creation, the human commitment to continue the work of God on earth, requires us to tend the land and conserve the waters, to till the garden and protect the animals, to use the things of the earth in ways that enhance all life now—and preserve them for later generations as well."

Chittister goes on to say, "The human-centered view of creation is a stunted one. It fails to recognize the oneness of creation, the symphony of life forms that depend on one another to bring the universe, pulsing and throbbing with life, to a wholeness that is mutual, that reflects the full face of God rather than simply our own." How we choose to care for the earth and look at it will, in the end, determine what others see. Obviously Creation is meant to be a reflection of God's face or glory, not ours. By failing to take seriously our role as co-creators with God we have marred or dimmed the reflection that is meant to be seen. This weekend as the gardens of Buffalo are on full display reminds us of that creative power. Now I will admit that I do not possess a green thumb. Yet, I am renewed and awed by the beauty of a garden. My creativity finds its expression in other venues.

**A time of love, a time of hate
A time of war, a time of peace
A time you may embrace
A time to refrain from embracing
A time to gain, a time to lose
A time to rend, a time to sew
A time to love, a time to hate
A time of peace, I swear it's not too late**

**To everything -Turn, turn, turn
There is a season -Turn, turn, turn
And a time to every purpose under Heaven**

Path 4 the *path of transformation* flows from the path of creativity We are to put our imagination and creativity at the service of compassion. Our sign post for this path is *be compassionate as your creator in heaven is compassionate*. This statement comes from Jesus' Sermon on the Mount. "In a word, what I'm saying is, Grow up. You are kingdom subjects. Now live like it. Live out your God created identity. Live generously and graciously towards others, the way God lives towards you." *Matthew 5:48* Justice and joy make up the experience that compassion is about. The capacity to experience our interconnectedness concerns both the joy of path 1 and the sorrow of path 2 that we share with others. Compassion is about the actions that flow from us as a result of our interdependence with God and with one another.

Everyone has a sacred story to tell and here in this place we hear and rehearse our story. The creation story helps us to know who we are, and the 4 paths help us live who we are. These 4 paths assist us in telling our story, our journey with our God. Each path has a gift: awe and wonder, darkness and surrender, creativity, compassion and justice. To everything -Turn, turn, turn - There is a season -Turn, turn, turn and a time to every purpose under Heaven. May we accept the invitation from the Holy one to move fully through all the sacred paths of life. Amen!

Where will God, the experience of the divine be found in our life seasons?