

“Through the Seasons of Life, God Remains”
Psalm 102:27

And so we have come to the end of the year of our Lord 2018. The earth has made a complete orbit around the sun since the last time we gathered here on New Year’s Eve. A lot has happened in that span of time—there were births and deaths, graduations and weddings, sicknesses and healings, tears of joy and tears of sorrow, and, of course, there have been sins and much forgiveness of those sins in the Lord Jesus Christ.

But the passing of time here on earth is measured quite differently than on any other planet in our solar system. For example, did you know that we on earth will orbit the sun eighty-four times in the same time that it takes the planet Uranus to go around once? So, we would turn eighty-four years old before a baby Uranian turns one. That’s a long time between birthday parties!

But since the average Earthling lives about eighty-four years, again, one year for a Uranian, what would our life be like if it were compressed into one earth-year? “Pastor, you wonder about some pretty weird things! If we would age 84 years in one year, that means each month we would age 7 years. We would be starting kindergarten three weeks after we are born!” True. But then we would be done all the way through high school in less than two months!

Well, I may indeed wonder about some pretty weird things, but that’s not exactly what I mean. Let’s not think of life in terms of days and years, let’s think of it in terms of seasons. Each year has four seasons, right? Well, at least in our climate here on earth. Uranus, by the way, has only two “seasons”—hot and cold. But let’s put Uranus aside for the rest of this sermon (“Thank you, pastor!”) and talk about life here on earth. For a moment, let’s think of our entire life in

terms of four seasons—spring, summer, autumn, and winter. Like the seasons of nature, each of our “life seasons” do not last the same amount of time, but when we have gone through each of those seasons we will have come to the end.

To be honest, this idea of life consisting of four seasons is not my own creation. Susan Palo Cherwein wrote a hymn about it and it is found in our own hymnal. So, if you would please, take out your hymnal and turn to hymn 595 and follow along with me as we think about life in terms of seasons.

The title of the hymn is, “O Blessed Spring.” The first season of life is spring. This is very appropriate. After all, when we hear the word “spring”, what do we think about? It is not new life? And so, whenever a person is born, for him or for her it is their “spring”, even if the calendar should say it is December or July. But the hymn takes the idea of the spring of life even deeper. It is not simply being born that puts us into the spring of our life. It is being born into Christ through Holy Baptism.

Let's read stanza one of the hymn together:
 O blessed spring, where Word and sign
 Embrace us into Christ the Vine:
 Here Christ enjoins each one to be
 A branch of this life-giving Tree.

The “Word and sign” of the hymn is a reference to baptism, where the water combined with God's Word is a sign of the presence of God's Holy Spirit to create new life in the one baptized. We know that the Bible tells us that each of us was born spiritually dead to God. But through the washing of water in Holy Baptism, the Holy Spirit brings to life the new man; the new man who is grafted by faith into the living Vine, Jesus Christ. Once grafted into Christ we grow in our faith, in our understanding of God's Word, and in our living of the Christian life.

During this past calendar year of 2018, we here at Messiah have seen two new lives begin through Holy Baptism. They were infants with the names Nolan and Luna. (By the way, we have a couple more who will be having their spring of Word and sign coming up soon.) But for Nolan and Luna, the spring of their life began when they were baptized into the living Vine, Jesus Christ, even though one was in February and one was in September.

And what a wonderful blessing it is for those of us who have been baptized for many, many years already to witness the birth and growth in faith and life of those recently baptized, especially the children. Listening to them sing in church or say their parts for the Christmas program causes us to smile in remembrance of when we were in the springtime of our faith life, when there was simple joy and childlike faith in all the wonderful and mysterious things we were discovering about God the Father, His Son, and the Holy Spirit. Springtime is a time of new life, and in baptism into Christ, we have it.

In time, of course, spring gives way to the next season—summer. And what do we think of when we hear the word “summer”? Yes, the warmer weather, even heat. And with warmer weather comes more activities, more busyness, and more distractions. There can be long stretches when there is little rain and when plants begin to show stress. But with the coming rains and the nourishment they provide, there can be dramatic growth in the plants.

Well, similar things happen in the second season of our Christian life. Let’s read together the words of stanza two of the hymn, “O Blessed Spring.”

Through summer heat of youthful years,
Uncertain faith, rebellious tears,
Sustained by Christ’s infusing rain,
The boughs will shout for joy again.

Oh, how we know about the stress that the summertime brings to our faith. The simple joy and the childlike faith of the spring is suddenly put to the test with the first blast of summer heat. Our sinful nature convinces us that taking a break from all that “church stuff” of the spring is well-deserved; that we already have all we need to head out into the world of temptation and do just fine.

Jesus Himself talked about this summertime stress in the parable of the prodigal son. And the thing about the summertime is that it not only affects the youth of the church, but it bears down hard on much more seasoned saints as well. The pressures of job and family, the lure of leisure and recreation, the love of money blow hot winds on the tender branches of our faith and sap us of vitality.

But the living Vine, Jesus Christ, is also aware of what we experience. He continually calls out to us to come to Him and be refreshed in the waters of His grace. He invites us to get out of the heat and come into the soul-renewing shadow of His wings. He offers us that simple joy and childlike faith that may have evaporated in the blazing summer of life. And He welcomes us back home again to rejoice over us and to re-establish us as His chosen and dearly-loved branches.

After the busyness and the hustle and bustle of the summer season comes the autumn. And what is autumn known for? The beauty of the colors to be sure. But autumn is also the time when the weather starts to level off again. You don't have bouts with oppressive heat but neither is it too cold. Autumn reminds you of what is soon to come but it is still a blessed time of the year with beauties that are not seen in any of the other seasons.

Is this not a lot like the third season of our Christian life? Let's read together stanza three of the hymn, “O Blessed Spring.”

When autumn cools and youth is cold,
 When limbs their heavy harvest hold,
 Then through us, warm, the Christ will move
 With gifts of beauty, wisdom, love.

The Bible talks quite a lot about believers in the autumn of their lives. Not only is it a time when the weakness of the flesh becomes more and more pronounced, it is also a time when the strength of faith and the wisdom that comes with experience become more and more evident. The book of Proverbs is basically built upon the foundation of autumn-like faith. Solomon wrote in chapter 4 of Proverbs, “Hear, O sons, a father’s instruction, and be attentive, that you may gain insight, for I give you good precepts; do not forsake my teaching. When I was a son with my father, tender, the only one in the sight of my mother, he taught me and said to me, ‘Let your heart hold fast my words; keep my commandments, and live.’”

What a blessing for the whole of the church are those saints who are in the autumn of their life; who have gone through the temptations of the summer and have emerged with penitent faith and trust in God. Saints in the autumn of their life can pass on great beauty, wisdom, and love as the hymn states. They can be great examples of patient endurance and a firm belief in the God who sustains us through all our seasons that we may glorify Him.

Finally comes the winter. The season of winter marks the end of the growing season and many living things die away. And so must come the winter of our life too. Let’s read together stanza four the hymn, “O Blessed Spring.”

As winter comes, as winters must,
 We breathe our last, return to dust;
 Still held in Christ, our souls take wing
 And trust the promise of the spring.

This past year of 2018 saw six of our family here at Messiah come to their winter rest—Charlotte Schuers, Floyd Utke, Albert Walls, Lida Miller, Elaine Zepp, and Herb Jorgensen. And besides these six, others of our larger family in Christ, many of whom are family and friends of our own, have also come to their winter rest. They have lived out their seasons for however many years the Lord determined and they did it with faith in Christ unto the end.

And that faith was not in vain. For, as the hymn reminds us, when the soul takes wing from the body of the believer at death and goes straight to heaven, and when the mortal remains of the body find their rest in the earth, a hope-filled trust remains. What is that hope? That the spring will come again. The firm hope of the Christian is that bodily resurrection is as sure to follow bodily death as the spring is as sure to follow the winter. And in that final and great spring, there will be life that will never know another winter. We will be ever new and alive in the living Vine, Jesus Christ.

So, whatever season of life you are in right now—the newness of spring, the hard work of summer, or the calm of autumn—God remains. He will never leave you nor forsake you. He has given you life in Holy Baptism and He is committed to seeing that life reach its full beauty and glory in heaven. You can enter the new year with confidence and faith because the ever-living Savior is with you and in you. Let's read together the final stanza of the hymn, "O Blessed Spring."

Christ, holy Vine, Christ, living Tree,
Be praised for this blest mystery:
That Word and water thus revive
And join us to Your Tree of Life.

We conclude the sermon by standing and singing together the entire hymn, "O Blessed Spring."