

# Seasons of Life

by Joy Newcom

Not long after moving to Texas in 1986, I discovered that the rhythm of my life followed a steady four-season beat. As the southern summer moved into a time I came to think of as “not summer,” I began to grieve for what I now understood I missed: the distinct crispness of an Iowa autumn with its burnt umber farm fields and dark, frosty mornings.

My life, I realized, relied on the dependability of changing seasons for an intrinsic wake-up call. “Hey, life doesn’t wait for anyone,” the shorter days of the year seemed to say. “The earth needs time to focus on basics, and you probably do too.”

What I discovered as a personal truth then, remains true today. I rely on a divinely ordered changing of seasons as a way to renew and reconnect.

Those of us who have matured to the pace of both a seasonal and a liturgical calendar may take for granted the well-ordered-yet-never-the-same way that our lives intersect with the Divine. Whether it’s nature reminding us to focus on being alive, or Scripture calling us to focus on living, the steady push and pull of life calls us to give ourselves over to what might come next.

Because my lineage is full of farmers, I have sense enough not to speak about unfamiliar agricultural things. However, I’ve been told a lot happens deep in the soil during the coldest parts of a year—things necessary for a robust growing season once the sun begins to rise high above the earth again. One of the most helpful things is the rotting of organic material like leaves and fallen fruit. The decomposing vegetation enriches fields and flowerbeds that lie beneath winter snows. We can’t easily see this mostly hidden process, but we can see evidence of its good work each spring.

The soil waits for its time to sprout new life once more just as I wait for divine rebirth during dark and seemingly dormant days when I feel as if faith has faded.

Perhaps my most fascinating discovery is that Lent often finds me outside the bounds of the liturgical calendar. I’ve learned that the process of moving from dormancy and decay to recovery and renewal isn’t restricted to the 40 days between Ash Wednesday and Easter Sunday. Lenten-like awakenings have come during the heady days of college life, in every stage of married life, by the hospital bed

of my oldest son, at a performance of my youngest son’s choir, around our dining room table, behind the steering wheel of my car, next to a person I once thought of as strange and in countless other places where the longings of my heart have overtaken the hope that does not disappoint.

During my life’s Lenten encounters, I’ve benefitted from times of deep, internal decay—seasons of time where I relinquish ill-fitting dreams and philosophies to a natural death that enriches new fruit for new seasons.

The wonder of this opportunity for regular rebirth is a prospect I both welcome and fear. Yet there’s no escaping its divine pervasiveness. I now understand that just as summer fades into fall, and winter melts into spring, the seasons of my life move with a distinct ebb and flow that says, “Don’t waste time. Each day is filled with moments that ripen then decay—so celebrate now, even as you anticipate what’s yet to come.”

It’s been two decades since we moved back to Iowa—back to landscapes that showcase each month of the year better than any calendar can. This autumn finds me wrestling with the frustrations that accompany big life transitions. My 18-year-old son graduated high school and now needs to find a job compatible with his physical and intellectual disabilities; my 14-year-old son began high school, dating and driving all within the span of two months; my husband teaches at a college that’s being acquired by another educational institution; and a risky major career change I made six months ago is now drawing to a close.

Everywhere I look, life seems to be saying, “Let go of the past. Its seeds can bring forth new fruit in a new season.” And so I wait with Lenten wonder, feeling the promise of new life just under the soil of refreshed faith.

May autumn moments in your life lead to Lenten encounters that bring forth new fruit in God’s time—no matter what date your calendar shows.