

Ecclesiastes 3:1-8 & Matthew 19:13-15

“Every Season Has Its Fun”

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The Readings:

Ecclesiastes 3:1-8 (Everything Has Its Time)

3 *For everything there is a season and a time for every matter under heaven:*

² a time to be born and a time to die; a time to plant and a time to pluck up what is planted; ³ a time to kill and a time to heal; a time to break down and a time to build up; ⁴ a time to weep and a time to laugh; a time to mourn and a time to dance; ⁵ a time to throw away stones and a time to gather stones together; a time to embrace and a time to refrain from embracing; ⁶ a time to seek and a time to lose; a time to keep and a time to throw away; ⁷ a time to tear and a time to sew; a time to keep silent and a time to speak; ⁸ a time to love and a time to hate; a time for war and a time for peace.

Matthew 19:13-15 (Jesus Blesses Little Children)

¹³ Then children were being brought to him in order that he might lay his hands on them and pray. The disciples spoke sternly to those who brought them, ¹⁴ but Jesus said, “Let the children come to me, and do not stop them, for it is to such as these that the kingdom of heaven belongs.” ¹⁵ And he laid his hands on them and went on his way.

Sermon:

Open with Prayer

One of TJ’s favorite books, and one of my favorites to read to him, is a flippable book of seasons, called Summer Days and Fall Days. (Show book) Each season starts and ends with the line “every season has its fun.” The book starts with Summer Days, and when that section is finished, you have to flip the book over to read fall days right side up.

TJ loves turning pages in his books. We might finish Summer Days with “Hey, its summer, enjoy the sun. Every season has its fun”, and before I get to close the book and flip it, he turns to the next page, which is an upside-down photo and words that are hard to make meaning of.

In preparing myself for fall, especially this year with an infant at home, 2 and ½ years into the pandemic, and things feeling busier in general, I found many negative feelings creeping in. You know, those feelings of dread about work getting busier again, or the school year and homework and extracurriculars – how can I possibly manage this? That, along with the gloomier weather, shorter days and longer periods of dark beginning, and we’ve got ourselves a recipe for something really un-tasty!

But if we flip the way we think, we might be able to make meaning out of even the more intense, challenging, sad, or frustrating seasons of our lives.

Fall is one thing, for some of us – I know there are some pumpkin spice lovers out there, but what about those of us who aren't into nutmeg and apple cider donuts? Maybe instead of getting stuck on the things we don't necessarily love, or even like, about the season, we flip the whole book.

Going back to school also means seeing old friends you might have missed over the summer, making new friends, learning something new that excites you... and a faster pace at work might help us to find new ways to care for ourselves - like a hot bath at the end of a long day - which we might not want to do during the summer.

Flipping how we see things makes me curious about what Jesus meant by “It is too such as these [children] that the kingdom of heaven belongs”

To me, children are born pure light. At least that was what I felt and saw the moment TJ took his first breath earthside.

And since his birth, several people have said to us that babies (or children) are the closest thing to God. Taylor's always believed that.

And I agree. But I never really took the time to think too much about why.

I think there are a multitude of reasons, including:

Appreciating each experience, each taste, each view, and meeting them with curiosity rather than judgment. What if we kept such an open mind as to meet each new person and experience with curiosity rather than judgment?

Believing in themselves as they are. Babies and young children are not broken down by the world – When we're kids, we haven't been told that we are too short to be a basketball player, or too tone deaf to be an opera singer. Our uniqueness gets to live in its fullness, before we are taught, by society or otherwise, to conform to norms. I think kids are truly authentic, and even counter cultural in this way... which reminds me of all the ways Jesus was counter cultural. And here, Jesus is urging us to become like little children. As adults, we all have picked up the world's values. What do we need to do to recover our innocent faith again? How can we feel more connected to God? Maybe we can start by trying to feel more connected to ourselves.

And, kids have another special quality that many of us adults lose and have to again find – a deep sense of FUN.

Although I am grateful for the rainy days we have had in these past couple of weeks, with the drought, I am not one for rain. I usually try to avoid going out in it whenever possible, and dread even having to walk out of the house, to the driveway, to get into the car. If you got the Friday church email, you saw the image of a kid in rain boots jumping in a muddy puddle. I intentionally left it just the legs and boots so we don't know what the kid looks like. What do you imagine that child's face looked like? One of excitement – probably either a big smile or an open mouth, maybe catching rain drops, welcoming the rain and mud. Can you imagine my face when I walk to the car in the rain? Not so excited...

And as I prepare for TJ to learn to walk, I imagine the spring rains will be full of muddy puddles. And I know that seeing TJ enjoy it will make my smile wider, or my mouth open with delight.

Just that simple, in the moment joy. Not worrying about cleaning clothes, or slippery boots, or muddy footprints, but just living for the fun of puddle jumping. And it makes me wonder, what if we met those muddy puddles of fall with joy instead of dread?

What are some other fun things about fall, I thought to myself as I was preparing this sermon. Have you ever noticed that the sunsets are more red and orange during the fall? I tapped into my inner child's curiosity and looked up why that is. I would've never known the answer if I didn't follow that childlike quality within myself. This knowledge serves me no real purpose, other than the joy of the information itself, the wonder and marvel at such a beautiful thing. So I will share what I learned with you all now, in lay person's terms, so it might not be 100% scientifically accurate, but is my best estimate! And maybe next time you look at a sunset, you will feel God's presence in that beauty, feel joy, and have fun with your curiosity.

So, first, in the east, fall and winter create incredible sunsets because the air tends to be dryer and cleaner for the path of sunlight.

Now, the sunlight has to pass through all the particles in our atmosphere – the dust, water droplets, even gas particles like the oxygen we breathe that are too small for us to see with the naked eye...

And light travels in waves, and the colors we see are determined by the length of the light waves. The shortest of which are the blue colors – which is why the sky is blue during the day. And the longest of the light waves are the reds. Because the sun has a longer path to travel when it is just setting, before it completely disappears, we see the reds and oranges. The atmosphere is like a filter, so what is going on in the atmosphere affects the colors we see in the sky. And in the East, fall and winter create incredible sunsets because the air tends to be dryer and cleaner for the path of the sunlight's rays to reach us – thus the more vibrant sunsets. And now we all learned a new fun fact!

Learning new things is fun, though, isn't it? And something else that is fun is play.

Kids play. Use their imaginations. And laugh a lot more than most adults. TJ loves to play with his toys – he has rings on a stand, a sensory ball, plush animals that talk and sing to him, and many more. He loves them all. And he plays with them all. He even plays with his books.

When I read this book to him, he often wants to go through it at least one more time – not to hear the fun rhymes and look at the vibrant pictures, but to see how fast he can turn the pages!

And one of my absolute favorite things about my son, although it's so hard to say favorite, because I love everything – is TJ's laugh – it's amazing.

Taylor plays peek-a-boo with TJ a lot and sends me videos of him roaring laughing while I'm at work. It is always the pick-me-up that I need. Hearing TJ laugh, often makes me laugh too, even at my desk or walking the hallway, and it just feels good.

I've done a laughing meditation once, in a Sanctuary full of around 300 people. It was awkward at first, but it became amazing really quickly. It set the tone for the entire rest of the day – a tone of joy and of fun!

So this morning, I am hoping we might all laugh our way to an open heart and a joyful mind.

Through Laughing Meditation, we explore our relationship to spontaneous joy as we mindfully develop the ability to reset old stuck patterns and open to healing the body, mind, heart, and spirit. We all already know how to laugh. It is an innate part of being human, but as we age and face the inevitable challenges of life, we often laugh less and lose the many benefits that laughter can offer.

So let us look to the fall season with laughter and fun. We are going to do a laughing meditation.

Here we go – get comfortable – in your chair, or stand, or whatever position makes you most comfortable, feel your belly if you want to, bring a smile to your lips, and then laugh as you feel so moved! If you find it hard to laugh, try starting with “ho ho, ha ha” and that should help bring laughter

Laughter....

Amen!