

Column

Leaf season is just beginning in North Georgia. Buses coming up the highway filled with folks looking for color and apples has already begun.

How brilliant the hues will be remain to be seen. Whether there will be brilliant yellows and oranges or more mellow browns is determined – as I understand it -- by rainfall and temperatures. Regardless, on a more practical level, the laborious businesses of raking or blowing leaves has already begun.

Autumn leaves not only signal a change of season and the arrival of tourists, they have a deeper meaning, if we have eyes to see. They remind us of God's order. The seasons are predictable and cyclical. We pass from spring to summer, autumn to winter without deviation. Genesis confirms what we see with our eyes year after year: "While the earth remaineth, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, and summer and winter, and day and night shall not cease."

The change of the seasons is both comforting and discomfoting. It is comforting because, as I have just said, we see God's order. Predictability is easier to deal with than chaos. Just imagine how confusing it would be if spring failed to appear one year, or if autumn began to manifest itself in May.

But this yearly transition is also discomfoting because we know that we too are part of this transient order. In the words of the hymn-writer, "We blossom and flourish like leaves on the tree, then wither and perish." Tennyson adds to this thought when he writes, "He [man] thinks he was not made to die." We long for something beyond this life.

The good news is that there is predictable rhythm built into the natural order; the bad is I am a part of this order and am passing away. More than that, creation itself is winding down and is going to

die. Left to run under its own steam, one day the sun will cease to give its light, and our planet will grow cold and die.

If that were all we knew, we humans would have every reason for despair. But the God who has put the seasons in place and maintains all things by the word of His power, has revealed something more. In Romans 8, Paul writes: “The creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and obtain the glorious liberty of the children of God.”

What is he saying? As I understand it, autumn and winter will give birth to God’s eternal spring. Heaven and earth will be joined; the veil separating the two will be taken away; all will be made new, death itself will die. The Bible calls this new order: “the new heavens and the new earth” (Revelation 21:1).

Yes, that petition in the Lord’s Prayer – “Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven” -- will be answered. Moreover, we already have a pledge and foretaste of this great coming event. What is this pledge and foretaste? It is Jesus’ resurrected body that came out of the tomb on that first Easter morning. He is the advance sign and pledge of God’s future plan.

What should be our response to such knowledge? Go sit down and wait? No! It is to be about the Lord’s business in the present, including raking up those pesky leaves!

O HEAVENLY Father, who hast filled the world with beauty; Open, we beseech thee, our eyes to behold thy gracious hand in all thy works; that rejoicing in thy whole creation, we may learn to serve thee with gladness; for the sake of him by whom all things were made, thy Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen. (Book of Common Prayer)

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