

Column

It's leaf time in North Georgia. The colours this year may not be as brilliant as they are some years, yet leaves are falling and must be raked or blown.

Beyond the practical business of removal, falling leaves remind us that we live in a world of change and decay; moreover, one of 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."

This verse is both comforting and discomfoting. It is comforting because, again, we see something of God's order, and 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 the truth taught in this verse is also discomfoting because we know that we are part of this transient order. We too – in the words of the hymn-writer – “blossom and flourish like leaves on the tree, then wither and perish.” Yet, in the words of Tennyson, “He [man] thinks he was not made to die.” We long for something beyond this life.

So, the good news is that there is predictable rhythm built into the natural order; the bad news I too 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, God has revealed something better. 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.”

Put another way, autumn and winter will give birth to God’s eternal spring. Heaven and earth will somehow be joined; the veil separating the

two will be taken out of the way. 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, and, 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.

What should be our response to such knowledge, such a hope? Go sit down and wait? No! It is to say yes to God’s call on our own life and be about His business in the time given us.

There is pathos in autumn, but there is also hope. Go for the hope, and, yes, get busy dealing with those falling leaves!

LORD, we beseech thee to keep thy household the Church in continual godliness; that through thy protection it may be free from all adversities, and devoutly given to serve thee in good works, to the glory of thy Name; through Jesus Christ our

Lord. Amen. (Collect, 22nd Sunday after Trinity,
Book of Common Prayer)

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