

Stepping Into Spring
Reverend Dianna Niemann-Harris

March 28, 2010

There really are no words adequate to express my relief that this sermon is today and not last week! Something about stepping into Spring in snow boots is just WRONG! We were in Missouri last weekend in shirt sleeve weather. We've encountered snow plenty of times traveling between family in Texas and family in Missouri...but last week was WRONG. The further South we drove, the deeper the snow got. I was thinking a lot about seasons as we drove through the snow on the first day of Spring...seasons of the earth year and life seasons and spiritual seasons. What occurred to me is often our lives and the spiritual journey are as unpredictable as 12 inches of snow on day One of spring.

The rub is, we expect certain things. Summer in Texoma we anticipate heat - overheated cars, bath temperature pool water, sweat, sunburn. When autumn visits, we expect a bit of color in the trees, lots of raking, pumpkins and late squash are ready and that second crop of tomatoes clings to the vines. In winter we expect cold, watch for the ice, sometimes even get snowed on. Spring we look forward to flowers and green grasses, red buds popping out and dogwood blooming. We know the seasons and rhythms of the planet and what to expect. And just about when we think we really have a handle on it...a snow storm the first day of spring blows us out of the water.

It seems to me life's journey is not so different from the earth's cycles. As babies we somehow knew those Mommy and Daddy people would care for us. And as children we could count on a birthday each year and Christmas and fireworks in the summer and new shoes for back to school. Teenage years meant learning to drive and harder classes in school, discovering and exploring our sexuality and, for most, no small amount of drama to keep it all, well, dramatic. Young adulthood is about partner choices, to be or not to become a parent, career decisions. Mid-life is a season for some financial security, solid long time friendships, some ease in relationships. Later life can be a bit of a shock. We live in bodies which sag in new places with foreheads getting higher and most of us spread wider and move slower. Even though we never expected OURSELVES to get old, we aren't all that surprised it happens to others. Life is pretty predictable. Yeah RIGHT. Tell that to a child whose bike was just

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stolen or was chosen last for kickball on the playground. Tell a teenager life works out when she is unfashionably chubby or he has severe acne he can't seem to outgrow. Try convincing parents of a stillborn life is predictable. Of course we know what to expect in mid-life, until a partner of many years leaves...or the underinsured house burns down, or an adult child dies. Well, at least the older years are predictable...NOT! Things like a new case of diabetes or a broken hip upset that apple cart. Increasing costs on a fixed income, no longer being able to drive, and burying friends all toss our assumptions about our own aging aside. Like the seasons of the earth, the seasons of our life refuse to follow educated predictions. We do have choices how to handle life lemons...but the bottom line is at any age, we didn't expect 'em, we don't want 'em, and we jolly well don't don't LIKE them. Granted there are often valuable lessons from life's storms, but they are still about as welcome as a snow storm the first day of Spring!

Where I'd like to propose for your consideration and reflection is these realities might just say something about spirituality! What can we glean about spiritual journey from considering the journey of the earth and of our lives? Anything? Nothing? It seems to me our inner selves, the spirit which makes me uniquely Dianna, different from Don or Joyce or Jim or Annabelle is a growing, changing, moving something. There is a Greek word I love, *NEPESH*...Not only is it a fun word to say, it also is an embracing word. You see nepesh refers to the essence of each of us. My nepesh is my Dianness...that part of me which it seems has always been and will always be. That which is uniquely you apart from your job or relationships or gender or identity is your nepesh...and a nepesh cannot survive without growing. When we quit caring for, tending to the essence of who we are, death comes swiftly...spiritual death.

I think we need seasons, and some unpredictability in the journey...especially the spiritual journey. For us to experience most richly the depth and breadth and height and depth of BEING...our

spirituality needs seasons...and change...and maturing into different, perhaps more complete understandings. I see the universe as spiritual. While everyone is equal, we are all unfolding in different ways. It's like our personhood, the dignity and worth of every individual. A teenager is as significant as a 60 year old...the two are simply at different places in the life journey. So we are at various stops along the spiritual journey...of spiritual awakening if you will. (and please note here, life maturation and spiritual growth aren't necessarily parallel...the teen may well have a richer spiritual connection than the adult!)

Spiritual awakening is about realizing we are Spirit...and basically people come in three categories. There are those who are not awake; those who are in the process of awakening; and those who are awake. I believe the spiritual "path" is tailored for the individual. There are those in the process of awakening who need "spoon-feeding," and those who are on the path of self-realization. With self-realization we become aware of who we are and how to use what we've got. Another way to put it is there are those who need others to save them and others who know that the saviour is already within. The teacher or saviour is Inner Silence. There are many different spiritual disciplines out there and many teachers, yet they all agree on one thing, godbywhatevername is within; and to know that fully, we have to practice being God. The process of awakening and staying awake is allowing the Inner Silence/God within to come to life.

The world that is within us is the metaphysical. We know it as the spiritual world, the world of our self, the Inner Silence, godbywhatevername. We deal with the universe from this spiritual frame of reference that has attributes as soul, conscience, spirit and many others. It is the Nepesh which is the gateway to spiritual maturity...and our wholeness which leads to spiritual growth. It is expressed through the body, heart and mind we inhabit. These always work together. Mind looks outward and the

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heart looks inward. Intellectual and emotional maturity enable us to balance life and become more spiritually mature, learning and mastering the Art of Living in the Present.

Spiritual maturity draws us to an ever widening vision. As we make the journey toward the Inner Silence, we can no longer disregard hungry people, in Denison or Durant or Indiana or India. Growing spiritually means the Inner Silence pulls at us, expands our vision, nudges us into a global perspective to a point where compassion and concern widen to include the neighbor down the street and the neighbor living on the streets of Haiti after an earthquake.

Living in the Present moment with body, mind and spirit open in a global perspective, we can make life easier, happier, glowing and shining as a star of peace radiating as the sun creates it's art. May it be so.