

Series: SEASONS OF THE SOUL—April 9, 2006

SEE YOU IN SEPTEMBER
Making Healthy Transitions
Luke 19:28-44

I. INTRO

- A. I have a question for you this morning. What is your **favorite** season? Spring, Summer, Fall, or Winter.
1. We're going to give you a chance to vote for your favorite season (visuals—and song?).
 - a. Let's have all the **Spring** people stand. Just shout out one thing that makes this your favorite season (song? Singin' In The Rain)
 - b. Let's have all the **Summer** people stand. What's one thing that makes Summer your favorite season? (song? Lazy, Hazy, Crazy Days of Summer)
 - c. Are there any **Fall** people? What makes it your favorite time of the year? (Song—See You In September).
 - d. Finally, are there any **Winter** people? Now, after the winter we've just been through, I could understand some reticence on your part to even admit that—but be brave. (Song: Winter Wonderland?) What in the **world** could ever make you crazy enough to love winter? Just kidding. Let's hear it for the **Winter** people.
 2. Down through the years, poets and philosophers have seen the seasons as a kind of metaphor for life. They've said that life is a journey through this cycle of seasons. That's true. Life never really stays the same for long. There are beginnings and endings; times that are filled with fun and laughter; times that are melancholy. Solomon said in Ecclesiastes 3 that there's a time and season under heaven for everything. Amazing, isn't it that a writer of Scripture know the words to a rock song from the 60s!

-Not only is there a season for everything--there are seasons of the soul that every person moves through. And right now, you're in **one** of those seasons. Several years ago, a musician by the name of Nicole Nordeman captured these seasons perfectly in her song **EVERY SEASON**. In her song, she talks about how we can see God's hand in all these seasons--**if we're watching!**
- B. The last week of Jesus' life started with an unbelievable high. When he entered Jerusalem on what is now called Palm Sunday, people went absolutely crazy. He was cheered as the One who would free the Jewish people as their Messiah King. But during the week, the attitude of the people shifted, partly because they were disappointed that He didn't deliver them from Roman rule—and partly because of the rejection of the religious hierarchy. On Friday, they chanted for his death—and by mid-afternoon, Jesus was dead. On Sunday, He was **back!**

-What's even better is that because it's centered around Jesus, this week shows us how God works in these seasons of the soul.

-As we take this journey together over the next two weeks, I can guarantee you that you are going to identify with one of these seasons.

So ask yourself, "What season am I in right now—what kind of work do I need to do—and what do I need **God** to do for me?"

-Today we're going to talk about Summer—the time when you look around you and say, "Wow! Life is **good!** But we're also going to talk about Fall—an uncomfortable season of instability and transition.

II. THE LONG, WARM DAYS OF THE SON

A. Summer always seems to have one day or one week when everything kinda crescendos to an all-time high--a memorable day.

-Let me tell you what looks like for me. It's vacation; I'm at a cottage on a lake in Northern Ontario. We've had a great day as a family. I bankrupted everyone at the morning Monopoly game; we've had a blast water-skiing and tubing. And when we got to our fishing spot in the evening, the bass were competing to get on our lines. Everyone caught fish, but *I* caught the biggest one. The sun is setting--and as we head back with a tinge of coolness in the air, you can smell the smoke from someone's woodstove wafting across the lake. That, for me, is the perfect summer day. Maybe you have one too.

1. This day has been called **Palm Sunday** down through history. Jesus had been traveling around the country teaching people about a new kingdom that was coming and doing miracles to prove that He was the Son of God—their Messiah. When he rode into Jerusalem that Sunday, the center of Jewish history and Jewish faith, crowds of people proclaimed him King. They waved palm branches—then threw their coats and threw palm branches on the road in front of him.
 - They called out "Save us! Son of David." Even little children were shouting this. This was **huge**. All of the miracles, teaching, and confrontations had crescendoed into this amazing day when it seemed like everyone **got it**. The religious professionals who hated Jesus were scared to death. They said, "Look! The **whole world** has gone after him!"
3. For the disciples in particular, this was Summer with a capital 'S.' I would've been thinking, "Wow! I hope this **never** ends. Everything I had always hoped was true—is **true!** All those friends who thought I was an idiot for hanging out with Jesus—I'll bet they're eating their words right about now!"
 - a. It wasn't just this day—it was their memories of the past 3 years—watching him holler at a storm—"Hey, cut it out"—and watching the wind and waves slink out of sight, tail between their legs. Memories of a little lunch—multiplied in Jesus' hands thousands of times. Memories of dead people coming to life, blind eyes seeing. Memories of messages Jesus preached the burned like fire inside. Imagine being a part of all that!
 - My guess is that at first it was spectacular—and then it normalized. It was what they expected.
 - b. Some of you know that Lori and I went through a very difficult struggle with infertility for 5 years. Our cry at that time was, "God, would you please just give us one child. Please! Just **one**." Honestly, we thought that if we could

have children, that would be such a huge, amazing answer to prayer, such a privilege, we'd treasure every day.

-Now we have them. Are we grateful? **Definitely!** Do we ever struggle? Ask, "Why would normal people ever **do** this to themselves? Why, oh **why** did I ever come to this place?" Of **course** not--what do you take us for--ungrateful slobs? Actually, we do. You do too!

c. I'll bet the disciples eventually took this summer season for granted. I'll bet they even **complained!**

4. Know what's strange? Some people totally missed summer! Tragic, isn't it, that in the most perfect season that could ever be--when people could **touch God**--they **missed** Him! That's exactly what Jesus says:

When the city came into view, he wept over it. "If you had only recognized this day, and everything that was good for you! But now it's too late (Luke 19:41-42 Msg). Jesus went on to describe in detail the total destruction of Jerusalem that would happen 40 years in the future. Then He says, All **this because you didn't RECOGNIZE and WELCOME God's personal visit (Luke 19:44b Msg).**

B. The summer season of the soul is a time when life is good; when, generally speaking, there's plenty to go around and no major crises looming on the horizon, no major changes in the near future.

-The summer season is the one you look back on as the "good old days." The days when you're healthy, when you feel loved—or at least liked, when you may not have all you want, but you have enough. A time when you have good friends, a place of warmth and peace and blessing. Summer is a good time.

- Know what I sometimes do in the summer? I complain. I complain about the heat, about sunburn, about the crazy weekend traffic, about the kids being bored at home, about mosquitoes, about the sun shining in the window too early.

1. You know where I'm going, don't you? We can **miss** the joy of the summer season of our souls—**right in the middle of a blessed life!** We really can. In fact, this is the only season we **can** miss. Can't miss the others! They're pretty much in your face. Fall, a time of change and upheaval—you can't miss that one. And Winter—a time when you shiver in the bleakness; when you first wonder if you're going to die—and then you kinda hope you will. Can't miss that. And Spring—things are new, and a little scary and unpredictable. Can't miss that. But summer you can miss as one day kinda blurs into the next. I always thought the fastest two weeks in the year are the two we spend at the cottage! Boy do they go fast!

2. Why do we miss summer? Well, sometimes it's because of the pace of our lives. It's possible, you know, to become too busy to listen to the birds, to watch sunsets, to build margin in your life so you have reserves for the other seasons. Or you can miss summer because of a complaining, whining spirit. All you see are the little aggravations—not the **immense** blessings of God. So, you whine, criticize, nag...

-Some people are so impatient with the little hassles and problems of the summer era; they literally **wish their lives away.** They're tapping their toes impatiently—and they never learn to love the moment.

3. So, my advice to you is—***don't miss the summer season of the soul***—cause it won't last forever. Mind if I give you some suggestions on that?
- a. First of all, make sure you have some recreation in your life. The word actually means what it says: ***RE***-create! ***Refresh, restore***. The bottom line is that our souls, to be healthy, need ***play*** time. If we don't get it, we become human ***doings***, not human ***beings***. Play means different things to different people. Let's sample a few. What is it that relaxes you? That, when you're doing it—time just melts away—and you come out feeling like a new person? Golf? Antique shopping? Fishing? Cooking? Gardening? Building?
- Some people are vertically challenged. Some are calorically challenged. Some of you are seriously ***fun-challenged. Fun-impaired. So we want to help you.***
BEACH BALLS; BEACH BOYS.
- There ***is*** a take-away here. God is the most ***joyful*** being in the universe. Joy is a gift from Him. ***So, don't schedule it out of your life!***
- b. Secondly, make sure you include some celebration in your life. Know what people who write on spiritual growth say about celebration? When you don't take the time and energy to celebrate, sin starts to look good! In the OT, God commanded his people to celebrate. Regularly. I mean, they were told:
"Hey, all of you! Leave your farms, your shops, your chores, get together with others, break out the beef burgers, the lamb chops and the wine and the band--and ***party***" (*the more spiritual word for "party" is celebrate*).
- That's exactly what Jesus says in this account. The Pharisees got all crabby and nasty about the celebration. Jesus said, "***If they keep quiet, the STONES will cry out (Luke 19:40 Msg)!***" Jesus knew how to throw one irrepressible party!
- So, I'm going to give you a prescription. Celebrate! Look at the goodness and the extravagance of God and find an excuse to throw a party! Gather people you love and enjoy being with, eat food you enjoy like steak, pecan pie, Kraft dinner. But ***don't miss summer!***
- c. There's one final thing I want to say about summer: ***Don't forget God!*** It's a documented fact of history. In the summer season of the soul, it's possible to forget God. Strange, isn't it? But true. People, in the abundance of life, of good things, of smooth seas and sunny skies--***forget*** God. Sometimes ignore Him. They begin to look in the mirror and say stupid things like, "***I created summer! Yea ME!***"
- So, be a ***grateful*** person. Remember that ***every single breath you draw*** is a gift from the hand of God. Make a list of the good things you are enjoying, stop whining and nagging.

And get down on your knees and say, “Oh, God, I am SO grateful for every good thing I enjoy! Thank you—with all I am!”

- d. **Seize the day!** Time and good things slip away so quickly. Children? Man—it’s like they’re toddlers forever—hit their first day of school—and the next thing you know, they’re grown. When did it happen? **While you were sleeping!** We only have **TODAY!**

III. THE TUNNEL OF CHAOS

- A. But we all know that after summer comes--Fall. Autumn. A time of change. And that’s precisely what you see in this story. After Palm Sunday, the turbulence hit. The people—instigated by the religious professionals, got increasingly more hostile. Jesus showed no signs of doing what they expected—leading a successful revolt against Roman occupation. He asked them to follow Him without instant gratification. And that made things tough for Jesus closest followers—because they could feel with winds of public approval shifting. Jesus was **definitely** losing ground in the public opinion polls. And suddenly, it was autumn. Change was in the air—and it didn’t feel like change for the better!
1. Now, Jesus had been telling his disciples continually this was coming. In fact, right after Peter finally figured out that Jesus was the Messiah—the Bible says, ***From that time on Jesus began to explain to his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things at the hands of the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life (Matt. 16:21 NIV).***
-Did you see that commercial last September where the woman sees a fallen leaf and screams in horror? In the lazy, hazy, crazy days of summer—no one wants to hear that Fall is coming!
 2. And Fall came. If I’m reading the Disciples right, there was this feeling of dread: “Wow! **Something’s** going on—and it feels weird and scary!” Confrontation reached an all-time high--the leaders of the nation are coming after Jesus fangs out.

-But Jesus doesn’t back off! He tells them they’re a bunch of snakes, hypocrites, white-washed graves. I can imagine Peter whispering, “Hey Jesus! Ix-nay on the ake-snay stuff!” But Jesus **doesn’t** stop. He warns them of their accountability before a God who doesn’t play games. Jesus talks about **leaving**; about them **suffering**.
-Have you ever been through a time of profound change—and you didn’t know where it was going to land? Maybe it was in your company—and there was whispering in cubicle land. Or maybe it was a time of deep pain in your home—whispers between your parents, muted yelling and crying behind the bedroom door. And you tiptoed around—your heart crammed with this sick, scary feeling that life was about to change forever. That’s Fall.
 4. Late Fall arrives for the disciples on Thursday night after Palm Sunday. Their celebration of Passover in the Upper Room--what we now call the Last Supper was undoubtedly a very dark moment in their lives. Summer to late November in five days.

-It was at this meal that Jesus told them things were about to change forever—one of them would betray him, Peter would deny him—and when push came to shove, they'd all take off like a bunch of scared sheep.

-Like these disciples, we'd all like to think we have more courage to handle change; that we'd never run off on someone we've believed in and pledged our life to. But sometimes in the middle of the Fall Season of change, we are so overwhelmed it's tough to think straight.

-Jesus told them that he had more to tell them about what would happen—but they had reached their saturation point.

-You can only stand the tunnel of chaos so long. Massive changes like they faced throw you into a tough, confusing, frightening, and sometimes lonely time. And that's **precisely** where some of you are this morning.

- B. Fall has always been my favorite season--especially early Fall. Don't get me wrong, I love summer, but there are so many great things about Fall. I like cooler weather. I love running when the sun is shining through leaves tinted with gold and brown and orange.

-I **used** to think I loved change, too. I saw myself as fearless instigator of change. I thought, "Why don't people like this? Change is good! Change is **necessary!**"

-Then, a few years ago, I went through a time when almost everything changed for me—from the way I did my job right down to the structure of our family. I underestimated the emotional impact of change.

-For example. During that time, about five years ago, we adopted a little girl—Selina—who is now 10! She is an amazing girl—cute, smart, funny. I mean, what a **fantastic** change, right? But I underestimated it. We moved 5 years back in time in our parenting. We went from 3 children to 4. It changed the seating arrangement at the table, birth order, how we ordered our days. Suddenly Lori had no bedroom to escape to if I snored—so now she just stuffs a sock up my nose. Suddenly we had to think of daycare—and who would babysit...it was really **good** change. But it was change—disruptive, unsettling.

-Right in the middle of all that, our parents were shifting in their roles from helpers—to needing help. And we became the meat in the sandwich. Suddenly I, **Mr. Lover-of-Change**, began to long for a place in my life where I had at least **one** foot on solid ground. Some of you are saying, "Hey, it serves you **right!**" I know.

1. There was a study done in 1967 called the Holmes-Raeh stress test on how change affects us. What they found is that **any** change affects us. There is this range that goes all the way from 100, representing the death of a spouse or a child down to 12 for the Christmas season. Divorce rates a 73; personal injury rates a 63. Even marriage--potentially a **good** thing, rates a 50. I have the scale here—anyone want to know what your change is rated?

-I recently did some calculations and found that my change quotient a few years ago hit 294. At 300 you're supposed to be dead! At that rate, I couldn't even afford to get a speeding ticket! And your chances of a health crisis go up with your change Q.

2. Some of you right now are smack in the middle of Fall - a season of change in your life. Maybe you graduated from University, or just got married, or changed

jobs, or had children. **Big** change--bigger than you ever realized, I'll bet. Having your children hit adolescence, moving into the empty nest phase, going through a separation or divorce--**massive** change.

-Now, I want to tell you what the problem is. Life is **about** change. You can't avoid it--especially in the world we live in.

-One of the hottest selling business books a few years ago was **Who Moved My Cheese**, written by Spencer Johnson. It's a book about two mice and two little-people four mice in a maze. They're looking for their cheese—which they need to nourish them and make them happy—but someone moved it! It's really a book about dealing with change. Spencer says, **Change Happens. Anticipate Change. Monitor Change. Adapt to Change Quickly. Change. Enjoy Change. Be Ready to Quickly Change Again and Again.**

-We all have to face change. We wish we could sail through it, enjoy it and adapt quickly--but the disorientation feels really awful when all of a sudden the Fall winds blow. Joan Lunden says, "The only one who enjoys change is a wet baby."

3. William Bridges has also written a book about change entitled **Transitions**. Bridges says that **change** is different than a **transition**. See, change in itself is an external thing that changes our **situation**. We're usually forced into it--sometimes surprised by it.

Transition is the process of actually **facing** change and dealing with change. And it means us letting go of the way things **used** to be, and then taking hold of the new. Bridges says, **Transition is the natural process by which one dies to a new life.**

-A transition begins with an ending. As many of you know, my Dad retired a couple of months ago after 54 years of ministry. That moved my parents into a new area, a new house—I mean, almost everything in their life has changed. Predictably, I suppose, my Dad hit a medical crisis, went into cardiac arrest, and almost died. The changed happened—**now** they have to make the transition. Summer ends. Fall begins.

-Life is actually a whole series of beginnings and endings. When change comes—and it **will** come, we have a choice on what we're going to do with it. I suspect that, in Jesus' story, Judas was the one who felt that change and couldn't make the transition. He got out—and sold Jesus out in the process. If you experience change, but choose not to consciously make the transition—you will get stuck. People do it all the time.

-I have a friend who was part of the Canadian Team in the 1976 Winter Olympics. He went through the **change** of leaving a huge sports career behind, but to my knowledge has drifted ever since. He never made the transition to a normal life. Sometimes people feel that they need a fresh start, so they change schools, homes, jobs, even partners—but it's the same old life in a different package. There's a reason why people don't transition—it's hard work!

4. If you're in the Fall season of life, it is **so** critical to understand this. If you are going to **ever** make it safely through change, there has to be a transition.

-So, **so...** I want to ask you. If you're in the awkward, messy season of change right now, will you choose to do the hard work of **growing** through it? God will help you with His power—but you have to **choose** to grow. If you want to grow, there are three questions you need to ask. The first is this: **What is it time for me to let go of?** When you graduate from University—you have let go of irresponsibility. When you get married, there is a certain amount of independence you have to let go of. When you have children, you have to let go of your brain. I saw a bumper sticker the other day that said, "Of all the things I've lost, I miss my mind the most."

- a. And letting go is painful. You actually have to **grieve** your loss—even when it's the change is **good** change. In a number of conversations I had with my Dad in their process of change, I realized that he was grieving the sense of feeling needed by a group of people. He was grieving the opportunity of studying—and teaching twice a week—even though it was a huge relief.
 - b. Some change moves you immediately into what could be called the **tunnel of chaos**. I've been there—has anyone else? In that tunnel, you feel lost. Different. It changes your sense of who you are. And then you move into what Bridges calls the **neutral** zone.
We're going to talk more about this next week--but it's that in-between time--between what **used** to be and what **will** be. It's the Saturday between Good Friday and Easter Sunday. If you're a trapeze artist—it's when you're floating in the air between trapezes. Remember the Peanuts cartoons? It's like Linus when his blanket was in the drier.
5. And this leads to the second important question. **What am I learning?** You can learn a lot about yourself in times like this. You **need** to learn a lot when you're in the process of change so that you can feel confident about the next trapeze you're about to grab onto!
-As you know, caterpillars need cocoons as kind of a change room—like Superman and his telephone booth. But the point is to actually **come out** of the cocoon. If the caterpillar stays in the cocoon too long, it dies. In the cocoon of change—don't run away; don't try to return to the past. Dig deeper and find out what God is doing at this juncture of life. **That's** what the disciples ultimately found--that in this season of change, God was doing his best, most profound work--and they would never be the same again.
6. Which brings us to the final question. Who do **you** trust when change hits? Really. It's amazing to watch Jesus walking with his disciples through this Fall season. For them, it wasn't just Fall—it was **free**-fall. It was like they walked off a cliff.
- a. Listen to what Jesus said: **Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in me (John 14:1 NIV).**

-I would assume from what Jesus is saying here that feeling like your heart has a hurricane going on in one of the ventricles is **not** an inevitable thing.

It may happen—but it doesn't have to **continue!** In fact, there's a good alternative: Jesus says, "Trust in God; trust **also** in me--fully.

And I want to ask you--who are **you** going to trust I the tunnel of chaos? Are you going to just depend on your own resources to pull you through? Help you make a good transition? Why not trust someone who knows who you **were** before the change—and who knows who and what you **need to become**--and where you need to go--and will help you get there?

- b. Jesus made another promise:

Peace I leave you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and DO NOT BE AFRAID (John 14:27 NIV).

-Change makes our stomachs churn. Jesus offers us this chance to just let go of this load of uncertainty and anxiety about our future that is crushing our souls. It's like we're coming to Him with this huge backpack loaded with rocks. It's jammed with the unfulfilled desires we have for our lives. The fear of what the future holds. The identity we had that doesn't fit anymore. You take this heavy, lumpy load--and you leave it with Jesus. Would you do that this morning? Would you let go of it? You can, you know. And He will help—because, see, He's the only One who has access to your soul.

- c. Jesus makes one more statement in the tunnel of chaos—and it's for us, too:

Because I have said these things, you are filled with grief. But I tell you the truth: It is FOR YOUR GOOD that I am going away. Unless I go away the Counselor will not come; but if I go, I will send him to you (John 16:7 NIV).

-Very simply, when God orchestrates change, it means that something better is coming. To these disciples, sick with grief--feeling small, helpless, like a leaves in the wind--wondering if they would fall apart and humiliate themselves, Jesus says, "This is all for a purpose **way bigger** than you. It's for **your good!** And **HELP IS ON THE WAY!**" And it was. You and I have the power of God to help us make it through any season—particularly **Why would you try it alone!**

IV. CLOSING THOUGHTS

- A. Some of you this morning are in the season of summer. It's a season of abundance and stability--lots of good things happening. I want to urge you--in this season of life, **don't miss it!** Take time to be grateful; stop and just enjoy the gifts that God is giving you. Replenish your spirit. Celebrate! Remember God! And **don't miss summer!**
- B. I believe if you're in a Fall season--a season of change--God's will for you is to come out on the other side of that tunnel of chaos a **changed person**, not just someone whose situation changed. Will you do the hard work of transitioning? Will you grow--and will you bring your heavy pack of anxieties, frustrations, endings, beginnings--all the mystery and chaos and disorientation--will you bring it to God, and leave it in His **huge** hands--and **trust** Him—and find **peace**. Will you? Because, **you CAN!**