A.M.D.G. World-Wide Communion Sunday Text: Lamentations 3: 21-25

 October 5th, 2014

**Lamentations 3: 21-*25*** *But this I call to mind, and therefore I have hope:  The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases, God’s mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness.  ‘The Lord is my portion,’ says my soul, ‘therefore I will hope in God.’  The Lord is good to those who wait for him, to the soul that seeks him.*

**Great Is Thy Faithfulness: The Lessons of Autumn**

 Yesterday, I received a phone call from a friend of mine in Fredericton, where I served as a Minister of a church for 7 years in the late 1990’s. Fredericton is a beautiful city – located in the Saint John River valley, which extends from Saint John in the south right up through the heart of New Brunswick, to Edmunston in the north. And this time of the year is spectacularly beautiful with all the autumn foliage – bright reds and brilliant golds – colours much more vibrant than what we typically see here in Vancouver. Those of you who have visited the Maritimes at this time of the year know what I am talking about. Fall is one of my favourite times of the year. There’s something special about rustling leaves and fresh, crisp mornings, the tang of new crop apples and the bright oranges of pumpkins. I think we are so fortunate in Canada because we get to experience all the different seasons, and the lessons they have to teach us.

 I was thinking of that the other day when I happened upon a poem that I found many years ago – tucked away in a book I haven’t looked at in some time. Let me share it with

you. It’s called “The Wisdom Trees” by Water Kortray:

**I have come out to see the Wisdom Trees,
 to see their summer green take fire, red and gold in the autumn sun.
 Too soon, these leaves, this autumn fire, will fall
 and turn to crackling ashes at my feet.
 Why must they fall so soon?
 Lying down on the leaf-littered earth I sleep and dream,
 a special dream of tying leaves on wisdom trees.
 Leaf by leaf I bind them on with threads of gold and green.
 A labour of love, tying leaves to stop the Fall from falling.**

**A labour of love? No, a fool at work!
 The trees are wise to know when to let go.
 They understand that in the economy of God’s creation**

**part of life must fall away each year.
 Silently they accept and wisely they let the leaves fall.**

**The dream is over and I heed its lesson. Part of learning life is learning to let go.
 To learn the verdict of the seasons and willingly to let the leaves fall…
 … and think of another springtime.**

-2-

 One of the lessons of Autumn is that of ***acceptance and learning to let go***. Autumn asks us: “What are the things that we are grasping so tightly, that do not allow us to move forward or that clutter up our lives? What resentments are we harbouring in our hearts? What fears and worries keep us bound? What hurts or sorrows weigh us down?” The trees know the wisdom of acceptance and letting go – for only then is there room and possibility for something new to be born. The leaves of the past become the rich humus of the future.

 Autumn also speaks to us of ***discernment***. Geese flying south listen to an inner sense, which tells them it is time to leave. And we, too, need to discern – to listen to the Spirit – so that we can follow what is being called forth from us. Like the geese – there is a time for all God’s people when we must be willing to leave our places of comfort – of what has been – for the long flight into the unknown.

 And if Autumn speaks to us of acceptance, of letting go and of discernment – it also teaches us of the time to ***plant with prayer and hope.*** Last week, I spent a couple of delightful hours at a local plant nursery looking at all the Spring bulbs – daffodils and tulips, hyacinths and crocuses – in every shade and hue you could imagine. Fall is a time to plant – not for immediate gratification like we do in the summer – but to dream and to prepare for the Spring some months away – to plant for the *promise* of beauty after the barrenness of winter. Fall teaches us to dream of possibility – of what might be – to work towards it, and to keep the hope of Spring alive in our hearts. It asks us: “What bulbs of hope are we planting? As individuals? As a congregation? Of what future possibilities are we dreaming – and how can we prepare the soil now for the future?”

 And weaving its way with vibrant hues throughout – Fall teaches us of ***trust***. As Christians, we are people of hope – trusting that in the graciousness of God – when one door closes, another opens – when death happens, there is always transformation and resurrection to new life. That is at the heart of the story of Jesus and the promise of Easter. And essentially – that is what our scripture from Lamentations 3 is reminding us of this morning: *But this I call to mind, and therefore I have hope:  The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases, God’s mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness.  ‘The Lord is my portion,’ says my soul, ‘therefore I will hope in God.’* Most biblical scholars attribute the book of Lamentations to the prophet Jeremiah. And a time of lament it was indeed. During Jeremiah’s lifetime, the first Temple was destroyed and the people of Israel exiled to Babylon. Everything they knew and treasured was stripped away. It was the prophet’s difficult task to help them see that God had not abandoned them – that even from the ashes of despair and loss, God was working toward a future with hope.

 As people of God, Autumn reminds us of trusting in God’s faithfulness – perhaps *most especially* when change is upon us and the future is uncertain. That’s a good reminder as we look at our own circumstances as a church and try to discern next steps for the future. Undergirding our uncertainty, anxiety and yearning is God’s faithfulness. We are not alone.