

Scripture:

Acts 1:3-11

Autumn Days

Autumn draws me into a reflective embrace. The misty air, the golden leaves, the noisy call of geese winging their way southward, all these lead me inward. I relish autumn's quiet way of doing this. At the same time, I resist autumn. Mainly because it pokes "death" in my face everywhere I turn. I don't want to let go of summer's warmth and energizing green. I resist the inherent message of impermanence reflected in this season.

Letting go is absolutely essential in order for change to occur. All the major spiritual teachings hold this belief – we can't grow unless we let go. So, who of us passionately desires relinquishment? Not me. This call to love what is but not cling to it has been a longtime challenge. Every autumn I turn and face the big question: how to cherish who and what I have but to hold these gifts freely, with open hands and heart. I think I am getting better at it but I still sense some latent resistance.

Autumn leaves sailing to the ground speak of an innate vulnerability that is part of everyone's life. If we want to be spiritually transformed it is essential to include letting go as part of our journey. Each autumn I now seek inspiration from those dying leaves gathering in ever deeper layers on the ground. As the trees let go of what enabled them to sip of the nourishing rays of summer sun, their falling leaves will eventually become a rich humus to nourish spring's greening growth. If I stay open to the inner and outer changes that naturally arise, (if I dance more and drag my feet less about impermanence), my life can be a nourishing source for personal and world transformation. I hope the same for you.

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We are being asked to get comfortable with letting go a lot these days. Once again we find ourselves getting closer and closer to a full lockdown. We see people protesting it more and more. People don't want to let go of their control. Others don't want to risk their health or the health of their loved ones and no one wants to let go and so we stand our ground. I am finding letting go of a dream of a life plan and journey very difficult these days. I had plans for my life, for my work, for my community of faith, for my family and all of those seem to be crashing before me right now but that is what our story of faith is all about. I know that when I stop and look that those things that are not going according to plan, the things that are dying, and flying away are opening up opportunities for new growth, expansion, hope, new life. The image of a nurse log comes to mind regularly the spirit is bringing new life out of what is dying. As we live into this season of fall, and get closer to winter my spirit is filled with a reminder that all of nature lets go, there a seasons of dying, dormant life, letting go and rebirth. It is the same for us throughout the seasons of life.

I want to take us through a guided meditation today. We do this from time to time when we are together in the sanctuary and a few of us have been doing it together over zoom but this might be even harder in your homes because I know many now have a habit of multi-tasking through worship. So if you are watching while you are making breakfast or cleaning the house or somehow multi-tasking I want to invite you to pause. If you can't do it now do it soon. Pause and let us take some time to mediate and visualize and pray together.

I'm going to sit down too...

This Guided Visualization is called "The Falling Leaves" and it is written by Joyce Rupp
Now, Place yourself in a relaxed posture. Be aware of sensations in your body, particularly of any physical discomfort you might have. Allow peacefulness to enter that part of your being. . . . Do the same with your spirit. Let go of any tension you might be holding inside of yourself. . . . Gently bring to rest the busy things in your mind. . . . Allow your whole self to slow down and become still. . . . Take a deep breath and let it out slowly. Do this three times. . . . Gradually sink into a quiet place of gentle comfort and ease.

Imagine you are entering into the season of Autumn. You are sitting on an old swing of a cottage porch which is nestled in a forest. As you sit there, you feel the slant of the autumn sun warming you. . . . A calm mellowness fills the spirit of the place. . . . You look around and your eyes take in a vast array of color. The wide-branched oaks display their rust and wine leaves. . . . The sugar maples are bedecked with brilliant orange and red. . . . The cottonwoods and elms show forth their creamy yellow. . . . The autumn scene before you looks like a huge bouquet of flowers. . . . As you breathe in the invigorating air, you rock back and forth easily in the old swing, content to be within this serene space. . . . Now you focus on a magnificent maple tree. Notice how the leaves have changed from summer green into vibrant autumn shades. . . . See how the breeze tumbles them in ones and twos and threes, sailing them to the forest floor. . . . Watch them for awhile as they depart from the tree. Follow their journey from the branch to the ground. . . . Imagine what it is like to be one of those orange or red maple leaves, falling from the tree, leaving its home on the branch, drifting into the empty air, falling to the hard ground below. . . . What must it be like for the leaf to stop moving in the breeze and to no longer feel life pulsating within it? . . .

As you sit on the swing, you begin to daydream. You imagine how it will be for the maple leaf as winter comes with its harsh breath. . . . the colder air. . . . the long, dark nights. . . . fewer strong rays of sunlight. . . . You envision the vast amount of waiting, the uncertainty of what is happening. . . . You sense how the leaf begins to fall apart as it lays on the ground, perhaps hidden under a layer of snow. . . . you see how it slowly disintegrates and becomes a part of the ground on which it fell. . . . You can actually feel the surrendered stillness of the leaf as it loses its leaf-ness and unites with the earth. . . .

Winter finally fades away and spring steps in. . . . You join with the changed leaf and receive the fresh rains. . . . You feel the delicious, warm rays of sunshine moving through the soil. . . . And now the leaf that has become part of the enriched earth senses something stirring. . . . A tan maple seed in the soil of the disintegrated leaf is breaking open. It is beginning to stretch itself upward toward the light. . . . This tiny shoot of new life moves steadily in the direction of the light above the soil. . . . and a thin root from the seed starts its journey downward. . . . You have

become so much a part of the seed's journey, it is as if you have died and are also experiencing the stretching new life coming from the maple seed. . . .

You leave your reverie and become aware of yourself again, sitting on the porch swing, observing the autumn splendor. . . . You remember the journey the leaf took in your daydream as it fell from its secure place on the branch. You recall how the leaf became one with the soil, how it brought its goodness to blend with the richness of the earth, and from this, came new life. . . . You ponder your own life's journey through the seasons and recall an experience that caused you to let go. . . . What was the new life that came from your own dying process? . . . Is there anything now that keeps you from fuller life? . . . Pray to have the courage to let go of whatever might be holding you back from becoming more fully the person God longs for you to be. . . . Give yourself in trust once again to the divine Giver of Life. . . . Now gradually leave the porch swing and come back to this time and place.

Take moment don't rush it. In this November 2020 our lives are so different than they have ever been before. We missed our remembrance day ceremony, we have been asked to stop meeting with friends once again. I know I had a small birthday party planned last week and it turned into an even smaller party of 2. Most of us have started to pray for a different story by the time Christmas rolls around. I know many of us are getting very tired and weary of not being able to gather. I miss being together as a congregation and yet this week has only confirmed our difficult decisions. Still I invite you in the weeks to come if you are feeling alone to reach out to one another through a phone call or a video chat. Send a letter and let someone know they are loved and not forgotten let go of what you cannot control, let the worry and stress that does not serve you go. Allow God's love and light bring you into new life, possibilities and hope.