

Sermon Title: Fallow Time

Text: Psalm 90:1-6, 13-17; Deuteronomy 34:1-12

By: Rev. Terry Carty

Date: 10-23-2-11

Place: Kingston Springs United Methodist Church

Season: 19th Sunday after Pentecost; Proper 25; Ordinary 30

Main Point: With about a month left in this season before Advent begins the new year of the Church, recognize that we are on the edge of a new place of promise. We can use this time to 'lie fallow' in preparation for new growth.

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Read Deuteronomy 34:1-12

Deuteronomy is the 5th book in the Bible - the last book of the Pentateuch of the Hebrew scriptures. It is a repeating of the laws that God gave Moses for the Israelites to live as one people in unity in the promised land.

Moses was a striking figure. He had been God's Man, showing to the Egyptians and the Israelites that God was in charge. God insured that Moses stayed in command of the people as they traveled through the wilderness for 40 years. He was never out of God's sight and God gave him the miracles he needed at just the right times.

During those 40 years in the wilderness, a new generation of Israelites were born and raised. And during those 40 years the old generation passed away in the wilderness. The people who left Egypt as slaves knowing only to serve the demands of their masters, had regenerated into a people who knew how to survive on their own and how to seek God's guidance in making decisions.

Only Moses remained of the old generation and he would only see the promised land, not enter it. It was time for the new leader, Joshua, to emerge and take the people into the land that had been promised centuries earlier.

The death of Moses marks the end of the Israelites as a wandering tribe without a land of their own. It sets the stage for the next movement of this great nation. In this change, the people take 30 days to mourn.

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This week the temperature dipped to freezing in some parts of Middle Tennessee. First frost for some. Plants outside were covered and my wife started considering which ones would need to come inside for the winter months. The fall gardens are being harvested.

I don't know much about agriculture, but I think it is a time to gather in, not to plant. In a day gone by for most of us this would have been the transition to canning and preparing for the winter months when food cannot be harvested for the table. The ground will be allowed to rest for a while before being replanted.

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Our lives go in seasons. When we are young, a new school year can be a new season of life. Becoming a freshman or starting senior year are clearly different seasons of life. As we get older, our seasons are defined more by our relationships with others. People move through stages of growth and stages of grief.

Organizations move through stages of growth and stages of grief too. Take the church for instance. Last fall a group of us went to a training event where we learned about the life cycle of a church. If a church does not experience rebirth, it plateau's and begins to decline. Without rebirth at that point, it sustains decline and dies.

The people of Israel had thirty days to consider the loss of their leader and their life in the wilderness. Then they turned to their new life in a land than had been promised to their people. They experienced rebirth.

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That is the way it is in our lives. Most of us have experienced a loss. It could be the loss of a loved one, or it could be the loss something else meaningful in life - career, a relationship, property - most of us have experienced loss. Some of us may be in that mourning time now.

The Israelites had 30 days to mourn and then they got back to rebirth. Do we know when to end our mourning and move to rebirth? Do we know when to start life after loss?

Are you at a time in your life when you need to call an end to your mourning? Who can help you turn your face to the promised land and make your move from that wilderness? It is a matter for prayer, but it is also a journey that is best taken with friends together.

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Do we as a congregation know where we are are in our life cycle? In the last 30 years of this church, there have been times when the congregation has mourned that times had changed and the good times were lost. The church has rallied and gotten back on the plateau. There have been times when it began to grow again. Our chart has resembled a series of bumps that decline, resuscitate to plateau, and decline again.

Next Sunday is our congregation's Charge Conference - our annual big board meeting with our District Superintendent presiding. It is at 4:30 in the afternoon and I would love to see everyone in this congregation in attendance to celebrate our work in the past year.

Then I would like to see us, as a congregation, spend the next 30 days in preparation to begin Advent - the new liturgical year of the Church calendar. I would like to see us take that time to shake off the things that we have lost or that have kept us from experiencing new birth that put us back into full vitality and growth. We can think of it as letting our field lie fallow. Or we can think of it like the Israelites taking 30 days to mourn the passing of Moses.

This year, as we enter Advent we should have the fields of our lives ready to accept the rebirth that comes in cycles and starts our new seasons of faith.