

In Due Season

Allen and I were both in our 30's when we got married. She was 31 and I was 35, and by that point we had both lived on our own for a number of years, long enough to become pretty set in our ways as to how things were supposed to be done in our respective households. So not surprisingly, it took a while for us to work out some—shall we say—accommodation in those areas where there was some disagreement, some *modus vivendi* that we could both live with. Took a while, in some cases longer than others, but eventually we worked just about everything out to our mutual satisfaction.

Except for one thing. One thing that remains a bone of contention to this day on a fairly regular basis. That is whether you should buy fruits and vegetables only in season, or buy them whenever you want, no matter where they've come from, and no matter how horrible they taste. Which perhaps gives you some hint as to where I stand in this ongoing dispute. While there are a number of different foods that are at issue here, among them asparagus and raspberries, the one fruit where this most often becomes an issue is strawberries.

The question is simple. Do you buy those freakishly large things called strawberries that may look great, but taste like sweetened wood pulp, and are produced, not grown, I am convinced, but produced in laboratories and are therefore available year around, or do you buy real, albeit much smaller strawberries, that remarkably enough actually taste like strawberries, are grown in fields relatively nearby, and are available only for a short period of time each year in due season. As God intended.

Well, that's what I'd like us to think about today, not strawberries per se, but the whole idea of "seasons," by which I don't just mean the seasons of the year, winter, spring, summer and fall, but the idea expressed so famously in Ecclesiastes that "for everything there is a season," meaning by that a time, a particular time, a right time when that thing—whatever it is—is most appropriately done, whether that is planting seeds in your garden, making a career change in your life, or simply eating strawberries. A particular time for doing so, a time when things are most appropriately and most auspiciously done, because for everything there is a season.

Of course, the whole idea of such times and seasons goes back to the fact that there are distinct seasons of the year, and even today there are certain activities that can be done only at certain times of the year. In fact, until relatively recently in the greater scheme of things, our lives were largely governed by a prescribed agricultural cycle of planting and harvest which more or less determined when all things were to be done. That is not nearly as true today as it was a hundred years ago, particularly if you don't happen to live on a farm. These days, though, we have learned to manipulate our environment in ways to minimize the effect of days and seasons, for example, with artificial lighting, so that for most of us, those of us who don't live on farms, our daily routine hardly varies throughout the year. So much so, that it may be hard for most of us to imagine a time when that was not so or what that would be like.

To give just one example of how that's so, how we've been freed from the cycle of the seasons, take air conditioning and think about how much difference that one invention has made in our lives over the past century. I'm old enough to remember a time before there was air conditioning, at least a time before anyone's home was air conditioned. I vividly remember—this, of course, was in the deep south—lying in bed at night trying to go to sleep, though without much luck, simply because it was so stinking hot, and not just on rare occasion, but night after night for the better part of the summer. And because I do remember that, I also remember how much difference it made when we finally got air conditioning and you could actually escape the heat and its debilitating effects. That one thing really and truly transformed life in the south and the southwest in this country. Houston and Phoenix would not be among the largest cities in the US today (as they are) without air-conditioning, and almost no one would live in Florida year-round without it. And that's just one thing, though granted, one very big thing.

Coupled with the difference that many other such changes in our lives has made, the effect has largely been to de-couple human life from the natural constraints of the environment around us to a very large extent. On the plus side, that has led to an enormous increase in human efficiency and productivity, and much greater convenience simply in terms of doing almost anything. But on the down side, it has contributed to a mindset that we can have and do things whenever we want, and not just in some due season. I mean if we can have strawberries in January, why can't we have anything we want whenever we want it? A mindset that has taken a problem that we human beings have always had, and made it even worse.

That problem, of course, is patience, or the lack thereof, which is something we have never been very good at, as we can see very clearly in our Old Testament lesson for today from Genesis. This is a story I've read at the very least dozens of times, and know it practically by heart, but there's something here I had never noticed before this week. That is the contrast between the demeanor of Abraham and that of his guests. When Abraham sees visitors approaching his tent during the heat of the day, he *runs* to greet them and prevails upon them to stay a while. Then he *runs* to tell Sarah his wife to bake some bread and to do it *quickly*. Then he *runs* to the herd and picks out a calf, which he gives to a servant to *hurry up* and cook. He's in such a hurry that he's running around like a chicken with his head cut off in notable contrast to his guests who are simply sitting around in the shade of the tree resting and relaxing. The contrast is so great it's almost cartoonish.

That would just be mildly amusing were it not for what happens next, which is that one of the visitors tells Abraham that he's returning at a later date, specifically "in due season," by which time Sarah will have given birth to a son. Which Abraham and Sarah consider preposterous, since they are both by this point quite elderly. So preposterous that Sarah laughs out loud at the very idea, whereupon the guest asks Abraham, "Why did Sarah laugh?" And though Sarah denies it, saying "I didn't laugh," the guest replies, "Oh, yes you did." Of course, later on, when the child is born, Abraham is commanded to name him "Isaac," which in Hebrew means "laughter."

The point is there are two different time frames operative here. There's Abraham's time where the clock is running very fast, which is not surprising at his advanced age when there's presumably not much time left. So Abraham is in a hurry and rushes to do everything. The

guests, though, are not in any hurry because they're on a different clock, a clock where things happen in due season, and not just whenever we want them. Abraham and Sarah, whose clock is ticking, don't want to hear "in due season;" they—just like us—want to hear "Now!" And the danger—the very real danger as we will shortly see—is that wanting to hurry things up, not being content to wait for "in due season," they—we—will jump the gun in ways that will jeopardize the very outcome that they—we—desire. Because we're not willing to wait.

I don't have to tell anyone here, I'm sure, that we're just like Abraham and Sarah. But the fact is, I'm also pretty sure, we're probably even worse than Abraham and Sarah when it comes to patience. Our clock runs fast, too, runs fast because we only live for so long and we don't have forever. But where there used to be some things that slowed our clock down, some things in life that we had to learn to wait for (like strawberries), some things that actually taught us a little patience, that's not so true anymore, because all too often we think we can have things whenever we want. With the result that we have an even harder time than Abraham and Sarah waiting on God's time, waiting for things to happen in due season. Think about that next time you eat when of those "strawberries."

*In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit,
to whom be all honor and glory, now and forever...*