

Evotional

Bible passage: Luke 5:1-26.

Speaker: Neil Durling.

Sermon title: "Summer."

Date: 20.1.13.

Message:

Our faith isn't "Barcode Christianity" (BEEP – I'm in! now it doesn't matter how I live my life). Neither is it "Escalator Christianity" (this idea that we must always be more holy and improving in every way). I think, like our world, there are four seasons to the Christian faith. The seasons may not come in logical order (e.g.: we might be experiencing summer and then something knocks us flat and we're in winter). Also, they may not be split into equal quarters in our lives. We might experience far more of one than the others for a myriad of reasons.

I emailed a friend to ask him how he would explain summer. Here's his response: *Things are flourishing. I am close to God - things are going well - things are going easily in fact. My ministry is flourishing & I am seeing things come into fruition. The road seems smooth - there seems to be an absence of problems - & even when problems do occur they are dealt with comparatively easily & quickly. I am handling things well - taking things in my stride (not from a complacent point of view but genuinely being on top of my game). It feels like everything is working & coming together. God feels close - I am moving forward - all is well - I feel strong - spiritually & emotionally. You are probably going to tell me this all sounds flowery.....*

Luke 5:1-26 is a snapshot of the disciple's life with Jesus over his three year ministry. It certainly is a summer period, but maybe not as "flowery" as my friend sees it. For me summer definitely has fruit and vegetables, but there are also greenfly and caterpillars. Let's look at these briefly...

Greenfly and caterpillars:

- *So much produce:* When there is so much blessing we can become blasé or arrogant about it.
- *More work:* We can get sunburnt and exhausted because there is so much to do and most of it is exciting!
- *Temptation:* We can end up thinking it is all about us and we have to continue certain things to maintain the "success" (e.g.: reading our Bible at a certain time, when the sun is at a certain angle, with the curtains half open!).
- *Spiritual attacks:* They are more likely, in my experience, because we are a good advert for God and his kingdom.
- *Jealousy:* From others who are not in summer or possibly don't want to be and wish we weren't.

Fruit and vegetables:

- *Mystery:* Some things grow and others don't; it is all slightly beyond our control (if we think we have all the answers we're not asking big enough questions).
- *Growth:* It is so satisfying to have toiled and done something to see it work.
- *Joy:* We love eating and sharing the produce.
- *Thankful:* We realise how reliant we are on God.

So what?

I think there several pressures when it comes to the season of summer. Here are two:

- *The pressure to always be in summer:* So many churches, conferences, books, worship songs and read Psalms in services are about summer. Also, if we've been in summer and it's gone we can feel a pressure to maintain and recreate it with formulas. Continuous summer isn't a reality. Jesus and the disciples didn't experience it: There were misunderstandings, anger, the pain of Gethsemane, the perceived forsakenness of God on the cross, etc.. My advice? Stop pretending you're in summer if you aren't.
- *The pressure to not share our summer:* There are many reasons: We're British - we feel it should be spectacular, plus indifference from others, & not wanting to appear arrogant. My advice? If you are in summer please share it with us – it encourages those of us who aren't there!

I dream of being in a church where those who are in summer can share their stories to lift those of us who don't have to pretend we're in summer (we're actually in spring, autumn or winter).

Questions:

1. Did anything grab you in this sermon/evotional?
2. How can we stop pretending we're in summer when we're in another season?
3. Which season are you in, why do you think you are there and what does it feel like?
4. How and where can we share our summer stories?
5. If I'm not in summer and want to get there are there any practical steps I can take?

Prayer:

Father God, Thank you for the "summer" periods in my journey of faith. Please help me share this summer period in humble and helpful ways with others to spur them on in their faith. In Jesus' name, Amen.