

Small Talk – June 14 2021
By Michael Small

Seeing and experiencing contrast becomes a way of moving forward, measuring success and failure. Central to the contrast between darkness and light, or the dualities we know and experience, we are informed by the ancient words central to scripture – “I set before you life or death, blessing or curse. Choose life, then, so that you and your descendants may live.” (Deuteronomy 30:19b). The words of Ecclesiastes 3 were set to music written by Pete Seeger - *Turn, Turn, Turn*.

To everything (turn, turn, turn)
There is a season (turn, turn, turn)
And a time to every purpose, under heaven

A time to be born, a time to die
A time to plant, a time to reap
A time to kill, a time to heal
A time to laugh, a time to weep

To everything (turn, turn, turn)
There is a season (turn, turn, turn)
And a time to every purpose, under heaven . . .¹

When surveying the long history of one’s life and the lives of those who have gone before us it is often the extreme’s that we remember. It is those matters of life and death that become the “touchstone moments”. Hopefully, when looking back, one can highlight the many more moments of blessing rather than the infrequent curses – though both become a significant part of shaping who one is today, and the decisions one is able to daily make.

But, life is mostly lived in the in-between places. Rather than dwelling in completely surrounded by the brightest of light or the extreme totality of darkness, or being only good or only evil, or only choosing life or death – we live in the gray spaces. The extremes help us to appreciate the middle or normal places. With the most recent extreme heat in Northern Minnesota, I have so appreciated the last three nights of opening windows and hearing loons sing and the sounds of abundant life surrounding us all. Moderating temperatures bring comfort and joy.

In fact, we cannot live very long in the extremes, darkness, or light – but the extremes nudge us toward the center. Too much darkness over long periods of time will blind. Too much light over long periods of time also can blind. Rather than proudly sing “I did it my way”, may we all join our voices in singing “We did it our way”. Can we be comfortable moving from light and darkness into the shadows of the center?

¹ Listen to Judy Collins and Pete Seeger sing *Turn, Turn, Turn* in 1966 <https://youtu.be/qURAnrk30ng>

Perhaps, the question is, “what can one learn from the extremes?” Rather than following “true believers” down rigid paths ultimately toward destruction, whether they promote left or right ideology – what can we learn from both and how can we move them and each of us to the center where real and lasting solutions may be found. In settings of trust and conversation, are there ways we can learn from one another and ultimately change, expand our understandings, and move forward toward a better future.

Yes, let there be light and may we see clearly. Also, let there be darkness that we may reflect and rest. And let us walk together in the times between the dawn of a new morning to the dusk of evening. Let there be life and may we proclaim it to be good.

In the spirit and agape love of Jesus, Michael

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