

Today Brian Krum, the National Director of Baptist Youth Ministries was meant to be speaking, but like many of us he's been very ill and had to cancel several appointments. So, it's same old; same old.... As Paul Simon wrote, 'despite changes upon changes we are more or less the same.' Did I use that line recently?

On this day 39 years ago, I woke to a glorious spring morning. Life was good, I was happily married to Trudy (proving that one teenage dream did come true), we had three great kids, and we were enjoying life as we endeavoured to serve the Lord in Ashburton. By 10 o'clock that morning we had four children and by 2 o'clock that afternoon we had five.

Hence today, Bradley and Sian turn 39 – one already and one this afternoon. After Bradley was born I spent two hours talking to him about important things - he says he doesn't remember...

It was also spring and over the last few days I've been thinking about springtime in the spiritual life, what can it mean, what it could mean individually and together. And I had no idea when the week began that spring would finally come. Spring being one of the four seasons we experience in our part of the world, sometimes all in the same day.

Song of Songs 2:11-13

**¹¹ See! The winter is past;
the rains are over and gone.**

**¹² Flowers appear on the earth;
the season of singing has come,
the cooing of doves
is heard in our land.**

**¹³ The fig-tree forms its early fruit;
the blossoming vines spread their fragrance.
Arise, come, my darling;
my beautiful one, come with me.'**

Not sure I've ever spoken from Song of Solomon before – it's essentially a collection of love poems but hidden in it are some gems and this is one.

Note:

- The winter is over
- Flowers appear
- The season of singing is coming
- The cooing of doves – the cooing doves are a sign of optimism. Beyond their sorrowful song is a message of life, hope, renewal and peace.
- The fig tree forms its early fruit
- Blossoming vines spread their fragrance

Something has passed

Multiple signs of life – flowers, music, noise, early fruit, fragrance

Then the writer gets back to his real interest:

**Arise, come, my darling;
my beautiful one, come with me.'**

Maybe that's for another day.....

Around us are all the signs of spring – dormant vegetation has come to life – blossoms here, there and everywhere, vegetables not harvested are going to seed – bursting with potential; weeds are growing rapidly especially at this time thistles – the grass needs constant cutting.

LIFE!

In some respects, this has been a long if not particularly severe winter; winter ills seem to have come late and the bitter North easterly winds we had for a couple of weeks probably drove some to distraction.

The winter is over.

Now I recognise for many, at some point in their lives, winter is still present, whether it's the winter of dashed hopes, the winter of pain, the winter of grief, the winter of dislocated relationships, the winter of things not working out as we hoped they would and a host of other experiences besides.

But we'd be missing something if we didn't see the possibilities of spring. There's another passage in Isaiah which paints similar picture:

Isaiah 35

**The desert and the parched land will be glad;
the wilderness will rejoice and blossom.
Like the crocus, it will burst into bloom;
it will rejoice greatly and shout for joy.
The glory of Lebanon will be given to it,
the splendour of Carmel and Sharon;
They will see the glory of the Lord,
The splendour of our God**

In Isaiah's vision of new life which essentially is what spring is about, there is this promise that the people will see the glory and splendour of their, and by implication, our God.

With these pictures in mind I asked what could springtime in our journey with Jesus look like?

In no order:

- New beginnings
- A fresh sense of God being in us and with us; of Jesus leaping off the pages of the Bible; of being led by the Spirit in challenging directions
- Leaving behind the old and deadwood of winter - old ideas, old ways of doing things – embracing the new
- Life in its fullness – colour, sound, beauty
- New shoots, new directions
- Potential for fruitfulness

This is the promise of spring.

And can this be applied to us as a community of Jesus' followers? What could, what would springtime in a Christian community look like? What could springtime look like in this expression of Jesus' desire to build his church?

New beginnings – individuals responding to Jesus' call to follow him; some saying yes to being baptised and others saying yes, I want to commit myself to this community and it's future by becoming a member

Opening your life to a fresh touch from the Lord – as the song expresses it:

**'Times of refreshing here in your presence
No greater blessing than being with you
My soul is restored my mind is renewed
There's no greater joy, Lord than being with you'**

Refreshing always involves leaving stuff behind; some of us including me need to drop some stuff or as Queen Elsa sings in Frozen, 'Let it go.' In the film Prince of Egypt Moses goes back to Pharaoh again and again asking to let his people go. At one point in the dialogue Pharaoh scathingly says to Moses, 'you still gnawing at that old bone.' A good description of some un-renewed Christians although to be fair the situation might be different. What do you need to let go of, or leave behind?

Opening ourselves up to life in all its fullness – or as it is expressed by Jesus in John 10, **'I have come that they (you) might have life, and have it to the full;'** colour, sound, vitality and beauty.

Spring may include looking for a new direction, a new possibility; that's the future before Trudy and me, which from time to time we're quite excited about. We don't know what the future holds, no one does. We've listened to Maggie Smith's wise thoughts at the end of the second Marigold Hotel.

**There is no such thing as an ending,
Just a place where you leave the story
And it's your story now.
You have no idea now
What you will become.
Don't try and control it.
Let go.
That's when the fun starts.**

What we do know is that as long as we have health and strength we'll be seeking to serve Jesus. If we don't do this you're free to challenge us.

Perhaps mostly of all Spring reminds us of the possibilities of being fruitful – in this case fruit being the marks of the Spirit in our lives AND others finding Jesus.

So, what's it to be for you?

Same old, same old or are you willing to be open to making a fresh start, knowing that God understands our hearts and motives and Jesus assures us of **'life to the full'** and **'If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink. Rivers of living water will brim and spill out of the depths of anyone who believes in me this way, just as the Scripture says.'**

Prayer

