

In her outline for this year's Season of Creation, Barb Holtz wrote in her commentary for today's theme,

The Tree Mosaic isn't a random collage. As (photos are added) ~~the photos~~ among the branches (they) build a masterpiece of time – not from multiple locations, but (from) the same place. (They are d)iverse pictures that have stand-alone significance but (collected in this manner) build ~~the~~ (a new) whole. The framework changes as we are drawn in by the gathering of days and nights, mornings and sunsets, cold and warm, clear and clouds all compressed into one moment for the purveyor of the piece. In creation, all pieces or fragments depend upon the other. We only see a moment in the eons of evolution and adaptation that brought and continues to bring creation into reality, into being, into a continuum of life.

There's a lot to build on from that description. And it reminds me of something I began to really think about during my sabbatical two years ago. One of the projects I embarked on during that season of rest was transferring our analog video cassettes into digital format, so we could easily access them and share them. If you have ever done this yourself, you will discover that it is a real-time recording; meaning, if your video is 90 minutes long, that's how long it takes to record. So, I found myself sitting in the library watching these videos of our children when they were much younger.

One I watched was a recording of Lillian opening presents on her fourth birthday. Having a late October birthday, it was cool enough for us to have a fire in the

fireplace, so the gifts were placed nearby. The hilariously annoying part of the video was her seven year-old brother who wanted to help her open them faster.

Later on, I wanted to show our family the video and so we sat down on the couch in the living room and watched it – everybody remarking on how Adrian couldn't keep his hands off of his sister's presents! But that's not the point of the story. What struck me after we watched the video was that I was sitting in almost the exact spot where I had taken the video more than 20 years earlier. I was looking at the exact spot by the fireplace where Lil had opened her presents. Exact same location ... different time.

This space-time conundrum also came up in a book I've been reading. It's an old Japanese detective novel called "Tokyo Express" by Seichō Matsumoto, published in 1958. It's the story of the investigation around an apparent "lovers' suicide." The solving of the case is wrapped up in the intricate and complicated interconnections of train timetables. Over and over, the detectives are forced to ask the question, did the alleged perpetrator do something on purpose, or was it a coincidence? As one reviewer I read states: "Chance or Design? That is the premise of all intelligent crime."

Setting the plot of the book aside, the connecting point comes when an investigator meets a woman who is in a treatment residence due to severe tuberculosis. Limited by her situation, she engages in the meditation of using real timetables to imagine the places the trains travel and the people who ride them. She explains it like this:

Now, there I was, stuck in bed with no prospect of traveling whatsoever, and yet I found this timetable quite absorbing – certainly far more so than any

second-rate novel. My husband always buys a copy of the timetable and refers to it often on his business trips. Here on my sickbed, I have found in it an entirely less practical kind of pleasure.

The timetable contains the names of all the stations in Japan. As I read them, I imagine not only the station but also the surrounding landscape. *{She lists towns and train lines in Japanese, I will not try to pronounce.}* ...Yusubaru, for example, brings to my mind a village nestled in the mountains where lush southern trees grow. Amarume, on the other hand, suggests a desolate ... townscape, gray sky looming overhead. I can picture to myself the mountains surrounding those villages and towns, the way the houses look, even the people walking to and fro. ... Whenever I find myself at a loose end, I can open the timetable at any page and enjoy traveling through {these places} – wherever I please.

More recently, my imagination has begun to travel not only in space but also in time. For example, I glance at my watch and see that it is 1:36 in the afternoon. Then I skim through the timetable, looking for a station accompanied by the numbers 13:36. I discover that, at this very point in time, train number 122 is arriving at a station named Sekiya on the Echigo line. (On a different) line, passengers are disembarking from train number 139. Train number 815 is just pulling in to Hidamiyata. (On track after track after track,) at each of these stations, a train has just reached the platform.

At the very moment that I lie in bed, contemplating my emaciated fingers, trains are simultaneously coming to a halt all across the country. Countless people are getting on and off them, each following the course of their own life. I close my eyes and imagine these scenes. I am even able to work out, for each line, the stations at which trains are passing one another at that particular moment. This brings me great pleasure. The crossing of the trains is inevitable in time, but the meeting of their passengers in space is entirely accidental. I can fantasize endlessly about the lives led by all these people who, in faraway places, are brushing past one another at this very moment. I derive far more enjoyment from these flights of fancy than from any novel produced by someone else's imagination. Mine is the solitary, wandering pleasure of dreams.

(Chapter 9)

I find this a fascinating metaphor for the ways we move past people in our lives – again raising the question “Chance or Design?”

While I imagined the exact same location of our family hearth at different times (vertical line), here is an imagination thinking of trains and people traveling at the exact same time ... different locations (horizontal line).

As my mind cramps trying to grasp the connections of space and time, I'm grateful for the tree mosaic. It helps give shape to these perplexing ideas. It's the same tree – and the same gaps in the tree. But as the earth spins it produces different vantage points.

Speaking of time and space kind of spiraling around on itself, it is kind of amazing how content for today's service mirrored some of what filled the memorial for Al Brooks on Friday. Four weeks ago, as I read the outline for the Season of Creation, I thought that Ecclesiastes 3 would fit perfectly here: *For everything there is a season and a time for every matter under heaven*. Well, when I showed up at Linda Brooks' home last Tuesday, lo and behold she had selected that very text for Al's service. Then I found myself saying *this* in my homily on Friday:

Ecclesiastes tells that for everything there is a season. In an earlier chapter, it gives us words that are both honest and strangely comforting:

"A generation goes, and a generation comes,
but the earth remains forever." (Ecc. 1:4)

The writer looks at the rhythms of creation—the rising and setting of the sun, the turning of the wind, the streams flowing toward the sea—and recognizes something we know especially well at a time like this. Life moves in generations. We arrive, we live, we love, we make our mark, and eventually we leave this life. But the world continues. The seasons change – the cycles recycle.

Another connection happened when, without consulting one another, Linda Brooks and Jessie Bao selected "In the Bulb There Is a Flower" to sing in our respective services. The verses by Natalie Sleeth that reflect the more eternal changes of seasons **help move us a bit deeper in our understanding of God's time and space:**

From the past will come the future; what it holds, a mystery,
unrevealed until its season, something God alone can see.

Hm – "something God alone can see."

Sleeth begins the final verse considering the transformation that occurs after this life has concluded:

In our end is our beginning; in our time, infinity;
in our doubt there is believing; in our life, eternity.
In our death, a resurrection; at the last, a victory,
unrevealed until its season, something God alone can see.

The hymn has it right – only God can see the fullness of time and space.

And, yet, we receive a glimmer of eternity even now.

This is why we are called “Easter People.”

At our Council retreat yesterday morning, we read together that “The Church is to be a community of hope, rejoicing in the sure and certain knowledge that, in Christ, God is making a new creation.”

Right? We heard Barb read from Romans that “nothing in all of creation can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Savior.”

Christ’s resurrection offers a new creation! Writer Anne Lamott goes one step further saying, that we are “Easter People living in a Good Friday world.” Commemorating the 25th Anniversary of the 9/11 attacks – we remember what a Good Friday world looks like. But our faith informs us that death does not have the last word. God, through Resurrection, has the last word!

As the tree begins to fill with more light, we are transported to the quiet garden at the dawn of resurrection; just a little light blooming on the horizon, windows of color framed within the grey. From that moment on, regardless of the age, that light is there to shine, even when the world is mostly grey. The Easter event cuts through all times and places — offering us eternal life in every season.

“This new creation is a new beginning for human life and for all things. The Church lives in the present on the strength of that promised new creation.” (Book of Order, F-1.0301)

Understanding that we are Easter People, we will conclude our service by singing an Easter hymn and looking ahead to that new creation.