In the cycle of the seasons, summer is the season of fulfillment, season of ripeness, heavy with sunlight and flowers, life ready for the picking, fruit of the vine hung for the taking is fine: summer is the season of fulfillment, a special time when the life force comes to fruition.

Strange then, that it should also be a season of sadness. Why? Because we look forward to summer as a time of joy – as though our loves and friendships and labors should ripen then like the summer’s grain – as though the summer’s play and games and holidays and laughter should all come to special fulfillment – as though we ourselves should be ready in summer to live life full – before …. Before…. the coming of fall with its small deaths – and long before the big death of the winter.

So we try to grasp summer – hold on to it – only, only to feel it slipping, slipping away …away from us.

So…there is a special summer sadness – the way there is a special summer joy: a poignancy to this season, a strange kind of summer yearning – for something more, something beyond, and something yet to come. There is maybe a kind of summer disappointment. Is this it? If this is life-at-the-full – is it over? Is this all? Isn’t there more? Is this what we’ve been waiting and working for? And is it downhill from here?

You see, seasons of fulfillment (whatever the time of the year, as a matter of fact) – seasons of fulfillment are always sweet but also strangely sad seasons. A playwright (Oscar Wilde) knew, poor chap, what he was talking about, said there are two human tragedies: one is not getting what you want and the other is getting it. Someone once asked John L. Lewis, the now legendary labor leader with the CIO, what the workers wanted: he really was short, simple and to the point. “More,” he said, “more.” More what? Well, for us it’s a bit vague – often unclassified in our own minds. We want more everything I guess. But whatever it is – always more. And some of us never ever seem to know when we’ve got it all. When we are a “success” – we don’t even know we’ve “arrived” – but struggle on – become “work-a-holics” – always running – greedy, grasping to the grave – always driven,--always restless, dissatisfied, greener fields just beyond – as though fulfillment never comes.
June 28, 1988, Durham, NC       William C Bennett       Trinity Ave Presbyterian Church
Now – it isn’t that “wanting” and working for it is not one of the best parts of life. Looking forward to “is sweet indeed. Sometimes sweeter than reality – the exhilaration of expectation may well exceed the joy of the accomplishment,” Edna St. Vincent Millay once wrote, “I come upon no wine so sweet as thirst.”

One of the more gentler intimations of our immortality may well be our endless yearning for something more. Maybe our feeling that summer is never quite fulfilled is God’s whispering in our ear: “There are better things yet to come.” Beyond. Only believe…..

Sometimes I wonder how Jesus felt in summer. I wonder what his idea of fulfillment was. Did he wander the hills of Galilee singing (like ole blue eyes) “I gotta be me” or “I did it my way?”

This kind of ego-trip that equates fulfillment with personal gratification – no matter who gets hurt along the way – is, of course, not only infantile, it is also corrupt and dangerous: It breaks hearts, breaks up families and does psychic damage to countless numbers, especially children.

I think the whole life of Jesus of Nazareth says that fulfillment is an illusion – always an illusion – in the life of people who have never learned how to love.

Moms Mabely, that marvelous black woman comedian – had more sense than Sinatra’s song. She sang that song, “I did it our way.” And often she changed the pronouns and sang it “I did it His (with a capital “H”) way. The English language is the only language I can think of that capitalizes the first person pronoun – the big “I”. That’s scary. Maybe we ought to capitalize the plurals instead: capitalize We, capitalize Our, capitalize Us. Make it a little “i” and a big “We”. My House, my car, my property, even my son – poor wife!

There’s a rule of the spirit you might as well accept. Fulfillment is never, ever the big “I”. It’s always “we.” Jesus was right. Does anybody ever get what he wants? No. Not unless we’ve finally learned how to live – which means – learning how to love.

When it comes to wanting more –Jesus would tell us there are some things we need more of: we desperately need more sensitivity and more understanding. We need more tenderness and more compassion. Those are the sorts of thing that make us more human.
And we need less of the things that make us less human – less of our narcissistic envy with all its hostile – it’s more self-absorption – all its gula (as St. Thomas Aquinas called it)—its gulping, grasping greed.

For you, there is no contentment – no satisfaction – no serenity of spirit – more of the “peace” Jesus came to offer – no fulfillment that means anything – if we never learned to love.

Maybe that’s why St. Augustine prayed: “Our hearts are restless, O Lord, until they find their rest in thee.”

For as St. John discovered -- who knows maybe on one special summer day: “God is love.”