

DOWN HOME: Long, hard summer; valuable lessons

September 1, 2012

Where did the summer go?


OK, I know summer isn't over, at least for scientists. They can tell you summer won't end and fall won't begin until the Autumnal Equinox. This year, autumn falls at 2:50 p.m. Greenwich Mean Time—I think that's 8:50 a.m. Central Daylight Savings Time—Sept. 22. It's the moment the line marked by Earth's poles is at a right angle to the sun, and day and night are the same length.

But enough of astronomy. Students have gone back to school, Labor Day has arrived, and boys of all ages are knocking the living daylights out of each other on football fields. It's fall already.

So, to the summer of 2012, I say a heartfelt and unremorseful "Good riddance."

In many parts of America, this summer seared itself into the record books as the hottest and/or driest on record. Ironically, Hurricane Isaac arrived at the last moment, drenching our friends all along the Gulf Coast. Don't you wish all that rainfall could've been distributed on farms across the heartland throughout late spring and summer?

The Lord visits rainfall—plus all sorts of good fortune and calamities—on both the just and the unjust, on those who laugh and those who weep, on the hopeful and the cynical. But since life includes affliction and bounty, we receive them both, rarely with any control over their sequence, volume or distribution.

The last week of "real" summer, I visited with several friends I've  known for years and years. Over and over, I realized extreme heat and drought merely shadowed the trials and tribulations of recent months.

One friend suffered severe head trauma in a horrific bicycle accident. Another agonized alongside his wife through surgeries, multiple hospitalizations, unimaginable pain and a night when her doctor didn't think she would survive. Another endured unthinkable fright when his wife became ill overseas and required surgery. One faces uncertainty as the needs of his lifetime-dependent child escalate while his and his wife's physical strength diminish. Still others provided parental love to suffering adult children, while yet another laid off a longtime colleague due to financial constraints.

My friends' challenges provided perspective on my own summer, dominated as it was by my parents' automobile accident and subsequent recovery.

And they strengthened my faith. My friends spoke of God's goodness and love. The one who suffered the greatest physical pain, who endured the bike accident, expressed gratitude for the abiding sense of God's presence and the remarkable lessons he learned through his infirmity.

As summer ends, I'm grateful to see it go—although, at my age, I am loathe to wish away any season. Yet I thank God for his presence and for strength forged through adversity.