

After Labor Day
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When summer starts its endings, I get sad. Even though summer is not what it used to be (and maybe never was), I still imagine there should be a few more long afternoons left lying in the sun. Or swimming. Or thinking about sunning or swimming.

I spent the summer playing tennis with people who say “Yabba Dabba Doo” when they hit a good shot. Let’s not call this tennis quite senior tennis but it is certainly not the high school team either. Or with grandchildren who put on their goggles and their life vest to sit in the rubber kiddies’ pool on hot days. I also gig about a lot and preach to people who only hear me once a year and think I am quite splendid. You’d be surprised how hard it is to preach three good sermons in a row in your home congregation, which has already heard everything you have to say twice. The great thing about giggling about is you can preach the one good one, over, in three different places.

Because my subject with you is always new ways of thinking about the environment, adding strength to our capacity to face what we have to face, I am going to define a good summer for you. These words could also define a good season. You are, plain and simple, a crappy environmentalist if you only like one good season. Like youth. Or summer. Or sunshine. Or that one non-sustainable splendid sermon.

Age, winter, and clouds are as much a part of cosmic nature and human nature as their counterparts. Neither is the enemy of the other.

Good summer people understand that it doesn’t last. This season will not be the next season nor was it the last season. Things change. For all I know, it is time for a great human population reduction. And an animal one. I don’t think so given the artifice that is causing the trouble in the climate. But you never know.

Plus the point of life is not to have good vacations. The point of life is to have good labor AND good vacations. We have to be very careful about leisure. It is a season, no more, no less. Islands and “getting away” are great and so is the mainland and getting on and in. After Labor Day it is time to get off the saucer and into the cup.

The last two summers in the Northeast have ended abruptly with seriously bad weather, weather we haven’t gotten over yet. I think of Sandy and Irene. And we will not easily forget 9-11, a

gorgeous summer day that turned dark before noon. Some of us this year are having pre-traumatic stress syndrome as well as garden-variety sadness about summers ending.

So let's give a cheer for good old-fashioned grief. The great barrier grief, I call it. Ripe tomatoes fresh from the garden are to be grieved. First they are to be eaten, because there is nothing as good a tomato sandwich for a summer lunch. Then they are to be grieved because you can't get them in the winter.

I recommend that we end summer by following the morning glory's behavior. The shorter the days get, the more they bloom. Their tendrils and turnings show us how to climb off the saucer into the cup.

As summer ends, we may want to learn how to twine sadness into seasonality, the kind that welcomes sun and cloud, summer and winter into our lives.