IN ALL SEASONS - Episode 10 - Beyond Ourselves

Welcome to IN ALL SEASONS. I am Beverly Flanagan, your host on this podcast, for women like me, who love the Lord, in the second half of life.

We return to our perpetual question: How does LIVING WISELY, AGING WELL relate to our purpose in life? As women? As Christian women?

In this episode of **IN ALL SEASONS**, we are going to talk about how does LIVING WISELY, AGING WELL relate to living **IN A TIME OF BREAKDOWN**? What does does this mean?

I have for some time sensed that there were going to be some changes in my life, & convinced that there would be a BEFORE and AFTER, but around some marker in time, an interruption, unprecedented in my life. My sense was that this was true for the world as a whole. Things were proceeding in every increasing chaos & decline in every aspect of private & public life.

LITTLE DID I KNOW THAT IN 2020 WE WERE GOING TO LIVE IN A TIME OF PANDEMIC, WITH STATES OF EMERGENCIES DECLARED BY OUR FEDERAL & STATE GOVERNMENTS. CONTROL OVER EVERY PART OF OUR LIVES WAS MANDATED IN THIS DEMOCRATIC NATION, IN THE NAME OF PUBLIC HEALTH.

MY STATE, MASSACHUSETTS, WAS HIT QUITE HARD; WE WERE ON LOCKDOWN SINCE MARCH, WITH PHASED PLANS OF RE-OPENING, ALL VERY CAUTIOUS. ON TOP OF THAT, IN LATE MAY & CONTINUING, WE HAVE HAD POLICE INCIDENTS INVOLVING PEOPLE OF COLOR & VIOLENT DEATHS, AND NOW HAVING PROTESTS AND SOME RIOTING & LOOTING. IT ALL FEELS VERY "END TIMES". PERHAPS IT IS.

Our world is sick. WE are sick. We were all born with a Genetic Disorder that will in due time end our lives on this earth. That Genetic Disorder is Original Sin. But in addition to this, our world *right now* is sick.

And I am not just referring to the coronavirus pandemic, but to the state of our civilization, as revealed in this global phenomenon. In Biblical terms, this all-pervasive sickness is a sign of the times.

We have been living through an Unprecedented Situation, namely a Global Pandemic, called Covid-19. Have many of us lived through such a time as this before? Then of course there's the other issue, of Racism & Violence & Protests due to Police Brutality among other systemic injustices. Socialism is being pushed on us hard, & lack of knowledge, inability to think all the way to logical conclusions about anything, & fear make for increasing social instability. Anything is possible. Nothing is off limits or out of bounds.

The demands for racial and social justice that are finally being heard, coupled with the pandemic and resulting economic suffering have left me without words. I have listened, learned, and struggled. Like so many of us, my heart continues to break at the systemic and structural racism that we are so poignantly and regularly reminded of, over and over again. But to be honest? I myself have felt utterly at a loss as to what to do or how to respond.

First, we were hit by a pandemic and its economic impacts that have left millions out of work. Now, new questions about racial inequality and police brutality in America are bringing social unrest. It's a great deal at once. Many people are struggling and looking for a place to turn. The official motto of the United States is "**In God We Trust."** For many, faith has now moved to the forefront. Some embrace it, and many fight it.

Some people have been curious and concerned if COVID-19 was a sign the Apocalypse could be coming. Many people, believers AND unbelievers alike, are afraid that things are trending in a negative direction, with signs of the times that things are ending, that there will be some sort of doom that's greater at the end of this. And there is evidence that being forced to stay home has pushed all of us to face our issues.

In these difficult times of social distancing, physical isolation, fear and loss of health and financial security, this has become most apparent to us all: people need people. **As Christians we know: people need God!** Our essential inter-connection lies at the core of our humanity, the support we give one another sustains us on a daily basis, all the more so when the going gets- and remains- tough.

Many of us have experienced Stay At Home Orders from our governments- some for longer periods of time, some shorter. We have had to learn to Work From Home, to Home School our children if we are parents. Maybe we were furloughed from our employment or let go from our jobs. If deemed "essential workers" we have had to go to our jobs, in healthcare, in supermarkets, as first responders, as sanitation professionals, regardless of the risk to our own health.

Going food shopping has become an adventure- we must wear masks, stand in line to enter, go up & down the aisles according to one way signs, & stay 6 feet apart from other people, with only one line for check-out. By the time we are all done, we are ready to return to our homes.

Churches and gathering places for all religions were closed, & at best re-opened on a very limited basis, as have restaurants, and all personal services, such as hairdressers, barbers, even dentists & most medical practices. Public buildings & services of all kinds, such as city & town halls & libraries have been closed, though help is offered by municipal staff working from home.

Our homes, which should be a place of refuge, became a place of confinement, where we were either alone or with our spouse or family. All. The. Time. It frequently felt like being under House Arrest. We MUST enjoy our own company, get along with that other person or those few others who share our living space, or this will be an unbearable time for us. And sadly, for many, it HAS been unbearable, with domestic violence, child or elder abuse, use of alcohol or drugs to excess or more than usual, & mental illness made worse by lack of treatment, medications, or both. Concerns increase about physical illnesses not being diagnoses & treated during this time of protocols & precautions, all necessary, but limiting access to health care.

Nothing is “NORMAL”.

Our hospitals & other healthcare settings, especially those who serve elders & those with chronic conditions, have been extremely hard hit. Nursing homes especially have borne the brunt of this novel virus, with many contracting it, both residents & staff; at least 40% of all deaths from Covid-19 occurred among residents in long term care facilities. People have been dying at an extraordinary rate, funerals were not allowed, and in many locations, burials were not allowed either. At best they were allowed on an extremely limited basis.

I work with the elderly in healthcare, and am becoming an elder myself. This pandemic has been AWFUL, nothing less than traumatic for all concerned. Elders and their families & friends have been separated, supposedly for their own good, kept apart in isolation. The effects of isolation are devastating too- loneliness, helplessness, & boredom.

For the past few months, this country has put forth cautionary restrictions to stop the spread of a deadly virus and save lives. But in recent months, three black lives, those of Breonna Taylor, Ahmaud Arbery and George Floyd have all been snuffed out by a plague even more vicious than COVID-19. By the time this podcast is heard, there will likely have been more, in addition to protests, both peaceful & violent.

This plague of racism, unlike COVID-19, is not invisible, and we are seeing it far too much. It is time for every legislator, leader of a city, state department and government agency to put forth the same efforts and urgency that has been put into the cure for COVID-19. No doubt the efforts in both causes will generate controversy and division among the people, already split along political lines.

The nation is rightly shaken with anger and grief over the videotaped killing of George Floyd, a black man who was brutally pinned down by his neck to the point of losing consciousness by Minneapolis police officer Derek Chauvin while fellow police officers idly stood by. Hearing on the news of a Police Raid that took place at the wrong residence, resulting in the shooting death of Breonna Taylor, causes righteous

indignation among those whose hearts are in the right place. A man should be able to jog in safety around his own neighborhood, & not be killed like Ahmaud Arbery was.

But what isn't right are the subsequent actions undertaken by the violent mobs that injured and killed innocent people and looted and burned businesses, residences and whole neighborhoods in a number of major U.S. cities. The violence that usurped peaceful protests under the Black Lives Matter banner caused disproportionate harm to the same minority communities for whose cause the crowds gathered.

No person of good faith should dispute that the calls for justice, raised up by the millions of peaceful protesters who have assembled across the nation in the wake of these deaths to demand an end to racist attitudes and actions, have a legitimate grounding. Nor should anyone dispute that some elements of racism persist in American society, despite efforts in recent decades to expunge them. As Pope St. John Paul II stated in 2001, "**every upright conscience cannot but decisively condemn any racism, no matter in what heart or place it is found. Racism is a sin that constitutes a serious offense against God."** He's by no means the only faith leader to state that Racism is a sin.

This is from Steven Charleston, a Choctaw elder and an Episcopal bishop in Alaska

Racism is the Virus

One man dies in the street, pleading for his life, and overnight those streets erupt in anger at the injustice, not only for that dreadful moment, but for a lifetime of oppression.

One hundred thousand die from a virus, all innocent victims of a heartless disease, but a balance of color shows more die from one community than others.

Racism breeds death, either visibly for the entire world to see, or silently, hidden beneath the statistics and the excuses.

May the Spirit empower us to face this reality and not turn away: racism is as virulent as covid-19, infecting people who seem to have no outward symptoms, until behavior reveals their disease. The vaccine for racism is justice, the cure is equality, and the prevention is love.

These words bring together the two pandemics we live with now…**COVID-19** and **RACISM**. Elders play an important role in healing both. How? What do we KNOW? Especially if we are people of faith? Women of faith?

What have we learned from our experiences of life?

Whether or not they were about a Global Pandemic, we have seen, and lived through, Epidemics of various diseases- there has been Measles, Mumps, Chicken Pox, Rubella,

Scarlet Fever, Rheumatic Fever, Diphtheria, Tuberculosis, Polio, Lyme Disease, AIDS & HIV, Ebola, Swine Flu, and Influenza comes around every year.

Whether or not they were about Racial Injustice & Police Brutality, we have seen, & lived through, many Protests & Movements such as the Civil Rights Movement, LGBTQ Rights Movement, the Black Panthers, and the Gray Panthers. We have witnessed & possibly participated in many Acts of Civil Disobedience over Environmental Degradation & Nuclear Power, & Wars- *oh so many Wars*.

Whatever they may have been in response to, we have seen, & lived through, Depressions, Recessions, Booms & Busts, both of our nation & our own financial troubles. We have lived, loved, & lost, & lived to tell about all of it. AND LIFE GOES ON.

EVERYTHING HAS ITS TIME

To everything *there is a season, and a time for every purpose under heaven*:

A time to be born, And a time to die; A time to plant, And a time to reap what is planted; A time to kill, And a time to heal; A time to break down, And a time to build up; A time to weep, And a time to laugh; A time to mourn, And a time to dance; A time to cast away stones, And a time to gather stones; A time to embrace, And a time to refrain from embracing; A time to gain, And a time to lose; A time to keep, And a time to throw away; A time to tear, And a time to sew; A time to keep silence, And a time to speak; A time to love, And a time to hate; A time of war, And a time of peace." (Ecclesiastes 3:1-9)

We who are Christians have also learned Scripture, our faith traditions, and experienced the Presence of God in our lives.

He has shown you, O man, what is good; And what does the Lord require of you But to do justly, To love mercy, And to walk humbly with your God? Micah 6:18

In other words- Be kind. Be humble. Be accountable. Earn trust. Tell the truth. Remember God. ***We are not our own, we were bought with a price, even the blood of Christ.*** I Corinthians 6:19

We are human beings, created in the image and likeness of God, just like all people. No one has the right to crush the very life out of us. Our black, brown & indigenous men and women were not created to be executed in the streets, especially by those who have taken an oath to protect life. The Police, meant to uphold Law & Order, should live up to their oaths, and be respected by the citizens of this nation, not disrespected, not beat up on & killed by those citizens. All lives are worth protecting!

We must stand and fight — not by looting and burning buildings, but by standing together in love and unity, while we seek the Lord for strategy, which will eradicate this awful blight of racism from amongst and within us.

Division, especially racial division, has been a problem for humanity since the fall, and any work of reconciliation is, and will be, costly. It cost Jesus immense suffering and even death just to make it possible for us to be reconciled at all, to God or each other! But! (my favorite theological word) the hope is that through death — death to old ways, old patterns, old choices, old ignorances — resurrection comes. Resurrection into a whole, new way of being. Into a whole new humanity.

For He Himself is our peace, who has made both one, and has broken down the middle wall of separation, having abolished in His flesh the enmity, that is, the law of commandments contained in ordinances, so as to create in Himself one new man from the two, thus making peace, and that He might reconcile them both to God in one body through the cross, thereby putting to death the enmity.
Ephesians 2:14-17

Do we as Christians BELIEVE this?

It's time for majority white churches to reckon with and talk about the history of race as well as current racial realities in our own hearts and in the structures of our society.

It's time to mobilize prayer (and when possible, in the central square of our cities & towns) around the need for reconciliation. It's time to formalize relationships with BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, People of Color), local ministry leaders, and compensate their shared ministry. Our shared ministries can be promoted & healing is possible. If we believe!

It's time to open God's word together and hear God's heart about racial divisions and inequalities, because the Bible is FULL of it. So much of the latter half of Acts, as well as a significant portion of Paul's writings to the early church are addressed to cultures that were split along racial & ethnic lines.

Spirit is breath, wind, and life-giving power. It empowers and transforms us. Christianity teaches us to love God and love our neighbors, including immigrants, foreigners, refugees, and people of all colors. Do we not remember that song we learned as children- **"Jesus loves the little children, all the children of the world. Red & Yellow, Black & White, All our precious in His sight. Jesus loves the little children of the world".**

The Spirit helps us when we fail at this love, which we will do, whether because of fear or because of the demands on our time and energy. True love for all our neighbors is not something we can do on our own; we need the power of the Spirit to transform us and enable us to love those who are different from us.

The Holy Spirit chooses one, the human spirit chooses the other. The greatest challenge of the 21st-century is rightly dividing the Light of Christ from Satan, who may appear as the Angel of Light. Is Evolution settled science? What about abortion, economics, LGBTQ issues, racism, and the Church itself? The lies of the world have no power in Eternity. Do they have power over us, even those of us who are Believers?

We seek the Empty Tomb when all is said & done. We seek the Lord in His Resurrection, just as we seek our own. But we can't get to an Empty Tomb without a Cross; we can't get to Resurrection without Death to the old way. Racism in our hearts, our society, our culture, our country, our world, and our church is wrong and it needs to die. But we declare that death doesn't get to win. Jesus does. Together, let's long for that day, and humbly, let's invite Jesus to lead us to life.

And yet we're all coming together to confront that thing which has its SOLE purpose and goal of disconnection, discouragement, despair, and division — we're going to confront sin, death and the devil, but we're going to do it covered with the Blood of Christ and in the hope of the Empty Tomb.

That is all I can say about these two pandemics at this time, but I am certain there will be more. I need MORE!

This is Beverly Flanagan, signing off for today, and thank you for joining me on **IN ALL SEASONS,** for women like me, who love the Lord, in the second half of life!