

WHICH OF THESE THREE SEASONS ARE WE IN?

The Stanley Cup playoffs began this past Saturday. It is so different watching playoff hockey as opposed to games during the regular season. Wins and losses have more significance at this time of year. Players are under more pressure to perform well during these games. Goals are often harder to come by. Having home ice advantage in the playoffs is often more important than during the regular season in helping a team to win. Hits seem to happen more often at this time of year and fans reactions to them are more enthusiastic. Playoff hockey is very different and especially stressful to watch if you happen to be a Toronto Maple Leaf's fan like me.

As I watched the first game of the Toronto - Boston series I was intrigued by a comment made by one of the commentators. He shared how Wayne Gretzky once said that there were three different seasons in hockey. Wayne identified the first as being the regular season, the second as being the first three rounds of the playoffs, and the third being the actual Stanley Cup finals. Prior to hearing this I always perceived the three seasons in hockey to be the pre-season, followed by the regular season, and then the playoffs. Based on his experiences, Wayne Gretzky obviously felt the Stanley Cup finals were a completely different season from the other two.

Even though I heard this comment once made by Wayne Gretzky over the weekend I still found myself thinking about it by the time Monday arrived. I realized these thoughts had less to do with the Leaf's playing again that night but rather were a result of having helped a person earlier that day enter a new season in her life moving into a nursing home.

Changes like this woman is undergoing right now often mark the beginning of a new season in one's life. If I was using Wayne Gretzky's analogy of the three seasons, I would describe this person as having just entered into the Stanley Cup final. Up until a year ago she was in the regular season of her life living in her apartment independently. Because of several changes with respect to her health, these past twelve months has been her season of enduring the first three rounds of the playoffs. She has had to endure the realization she could not return to her apartment and has had to adjust to being dependent on others for her care both while in hospital and in a transitional care facility.

This past year has been gruelling for her at times to say the least. Last week Nadine and I went to see her to share the news that a room had opened up at

one of her preferred nursing homes. When she heard the news, it was almost as if she won a third round series and was off to the Stanley Cup. She put her hands together, looked up to God and thanked Him for answering her prayers and taking such good care of her.

Regardless of whether we follow hockey or not, we experience different seasons in our lives. If we were to use Wayne Gretzky's analogy, which one of these three seasons would best describe our reality right now?

- Are we still playing in the regular season with things going normal and according to expectation?
- Are we living each day under extreme pressure, intensity, and uncertainty much like in the early playoff rounds?
- Are we in the Stanley Cup finals knowing that we are getting closer to being called home by the Lord and sitting at His banquet table in heaven?

In Ecclesiastes 3, we can read about the different seasons we might experience. After identifying each of the seasons the writer then says: **Yet God has made everything beautiful for its own time. He has planted eternity in the human heart, but even so, people cannot see the whole scope of God's work from beginning to end. (Ecclesiastes 3:11)**

Regardless of the season we are in, it is so important for us to ***remember God has planted eternity in our hearts.*** With this understanding we may not be able to comprehend everything we are experiencing in that season, but we will know ***we can trust God to do something beautiful for us.*** God did that for this woman. It was beautiful for Nadine and I to see the expression on her face thanking God after we told her the news that a room had opened up. The trust she placed in God during this past year will help her greatly as she enters this new season for her. No matter what season we are going through right now let's make sure we keep seeing the beauty of eternity that God has placed in our heart. It is a beautiful thing to have, to see, and to experience.

The Leafs are in the first round of the playoffs, or the second season of hockey according to Wayne Gretzky. I am hoping I will still be writing about them in two months time that they are in the third season.

Keep safe and God bless,

Pastor Dean