



## **Familiar Patterns**

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In the past few months, I found a secret pleasure: Hallmark Christmas movies. For some reason before this year, it escaped me that a single tv channel had new, non-stop Christmas-themed movies. I watched many of them in real-time and recorded others.

Christmas is over, but I've still been hoping to watch all the movies I recorded. With the recent snow days, I finally found time to snuggle under my blanket with the dogs and catch up. They've taught me some important lessons.

In large cities, I've learned, everyone ice skates at the outdoor rink. In small towns, everyone waits until the week of Christmas to chop down and decorate their own trees. Then, they go to the local town square for a tree light lighting. I've learned that problems in love can be resolved with the aid of hot cocoa and gingerbread houses.

It's also become clear that black people can be friends, bosses, and mayors, but their lives are otherwise incidental to the more meaningful relationships of white people. I've come to understand that there are no Native peoples in Alaska and that somewhere in Wisconsin is a snow-capped, 12,000-foot mountain range. Being from Colorado, I can't wait to find that!

After watching bits and pieces of some shows, my husband asked why I enjoy them since they seem so repetitious. "My brain doesn't have to work," I explained. The patterns of Christmas celebrations, love and conflict, humor, character development, and more have become familiar to me. They're comfortable and easy. I don't have to think because I recognize the patterns.

Much of life can be that way. We take familiar routes to our destinations. We follow predictable patterns. We have routines. It's easy that way. We don't have to think.

As I observe our church life, I find the same patterns. When I act as pulpit supply, I usually receive a sample bulletin from the congregation. The order of worship is remarkably similar from church to church and Sunday to Sunday. It's comfortable and familiar. We know what to expect, giving us space to relax and enjoy worship.

It made me wonder what God prefers...not just in worship, but in every aspect of our Christian life. The examples that come to mind should make us uneasy. More often than not, God uproots and unsettles people: Noah and his family, Sarah and Abraham, Ruth and Naomi, Samuel, the disciples, Paul. I've been trying to identify instances in which God declared, "Just find a comfortably space and familiar pattern, and settle down for a spell. Have a cup of cocoa and a gingerbread cookie. We'll deal with injustice, righteousness, and faith formation later." So far, no instance comes to mind.

There are times for rest, of course. A snow day under the blankets might offer a much-needed break. If our lives are controlled by routine and invariable patterns, however, we'll be ill-prepared for what God might have in store. It can also mean that we are limiting our relationships with others in ways that are not necessarily authentic, even if they are comfortably predictable.

Having successfully cleaned out my DVR of Hallmark movies and returned from my snow day cocoon, I've decided on a new prayer, "Shake things up, O Lord. Make life messy." Would you like to come along?