Preface

I was on the beach when I thought of the word ‘Teleocycles’ I very much appreciate those friends who let me sit on the beach with them. Another love of mine is bicycling. I was on the beach, drawing in the sand trying to work out some piece of rough graphic art to depict in a symbol the stuff in the story.

Scrawling out bicycles, frames, chains, handle bars into loose assemblages of meaning, something akin to a mandala, the word just came to me.

We live our life as though it is linear; yesterday, today, tomorrow. Or we experience life as “I am here, what’s next.” But we know it’s not that simple, that somehow life is circular. The Oglala Sioux medicine man, Black Elk, says

The world always works in circles and everything tries to be round

We live in seasons. The school year begins and ends. We call graduation a commencement, a beginning even as it is an end, as we acknowledge the next phase of the cycle. We do ourselves a disservice when we disconnect from the cycles of life. Calendars seem to start at one and count through thirty-one. But if we watched the lunar calendar, we’d see new moon, waxing moon and full moon.

Men would do well to recognize that women are lunar creatures, living in a 28 day cycle like the moon, but I digress. The truth is both are true. We live both in a linear and a circular fashion. Life moves forward and yet it circles. The sun, that god in the sky, perfectly illustrates this. Day breaks with the dawn, the sun moves in a straight line through the sky and it sets at dusk, thus completing, finishing a day. Beginning and completion, linear. And yet we know it doesn’t move through the sky, indeed we turn. We are seeing it pass overhead, this fantastic dance of cosmic circles. And we’re along for the ride.

Earth is moving at 1.3 million miles an hour through the universe. And yet, our experience is that we are sitting still. To illustrate this metaphorically, people on a sailboat may look like they are going somewhere, but probably they are exactly where they want to be. That is, the experience of sailing is the desired end, not the traveling to the destination.

Life moves forward in circles and Teleocycles is a way of capturing this truth. The prefix ‘teleo’ comes from the Greek, meaning a form of completion, last or ending. And so as we move through the phases of our life like the moon moving through its phases, we have the opportunity to learn new things. We each are moving towards completion. But we are doing it in cycles. You graduate from high school and move on to college. Maybe you even complete a doctorate and surely you have arrived. But it is only a new beginning. Beginnings and endings, two steps forward and one step back, always we head toward our goal but the living of life is not in its completion.

Folks die mighty quick when they retire and don’t continue to live. A church friend just wished me happy birthday, he said they come around once a year and though it seems that getting older is a bad thing, he highly recommends them to me. Life is a series of lessons that offers us the opportunity to grow. Each one of these lessons refines us further, makes us into better people.

Jack Nicholson plays a person suffering with obsessive compulsive disorder in the movie, “As Good as it Gets.” He meets a beautiful waitress and this stretches him. He is challenged to overcome his deficits in service of having a relationship with her. His desire moves him beyond his own barriers. He sums this up in a toast to her. “You make me want to be a better man.”

And so this journey is a process of moving toward completion, some final version of ourselves that is ….what, perfect? Whole? My Christian upbringing taught that one’s goal is to be “saved.” And that was it. I learned from an early age, ‘once saved, always saved.’ My ticket was punched and I was going to heaven.

Teleocycles is an effort to describe life is a journey that is not completed. It develops in richness and meaning throughout the life cycle. And yet we are pressing on toward a mark that is the next goal. No need to think about what’s after that, today has enough worries for itself.

Hopefully, we’ll be able to harmonize the truth of linear and circular. Hopefully we’ll be able to hear the music of our own lives that is both full and unfinished, complete and unfolding.

Again, in my own Christian language, we are saved by grace and at the same time, faith without works is dead. We have to integrate the truth that we are already there even as we are trying to get there.

You must be perfect, just as your heavenly Father is perfect

Matthew 5:48