

Is This the Time?
Sermon Preached on January 1, 2012
at Knox United Church, Parksville
by
the Rev. Hilde Seal

On this first day of the new year...
come.... pray.....

*O Holy and Loving God;
we have before us a new year,
full of possibilities and promise.*

*Help us to remember to invite you
into all that we do.*

*Bring us into a deeper relationship with you,
and teach us your ways. AMEN*

Arlene just read the words of a man
who lived about 200 years before the birth of Jesus;
a man educated in Greek wisdom and nurtured in Jewish piety.

The author of Ecclesiastes identifies himself only as
'the son of David, king in Jerusalem'.

Jewish and early Christian tradition,
attribute the book to Solomon.

Modern scholars are not so sure the author is Solomon,
and choose to refer to this author as "the Preacher"...
although, he is really a teacher of wisdom.

The author... 'the Preacher'....
lived in a period of catastrophes and great despair.

Most of Ecclesiastes is an expression of this despair....
pessimism fills the chapters; cynicism and gloom everywhere.

We might wonder how or why this book made it into scripture....
how this dark reflection of the destiny of human kind,
fits as a Biblical book.

In fact, it took a long time for the book of Ecclesiastes to be accepted...
but finally synagogue and church said yes,
and now, it too, informs us about our relationship to the Holy.

The book begins...

'Vanity of vanities... all is vanity.

What do people gain from all the toil at which they toil under the sun?'

The Preacher continues...

' All things are wearisome; more than one can express;
the eye is not satisfied with seeing, or the ear filled with hearing.....
there is nothing new under the sun.'

The Preacher even goes on to say...

that.... 'pleasing God is also in vain.'

Still... we are reminded.... there is a time...

an appointed hour, for all things under heaven, says the Preacher.

Is this the time?

In fourteen contrasts... he embraces the whole of human existence,
showing that everything has its time....

*birth, death,
plant, uproot,
kill, heal,
mourn, dance,
keep, throw away,
war, peace and more...*

Notice the balance though... a balance with the despair,
and there is the perception that *everything* has its time.

We must remember that the ancient world
was driven by the belief, that for *everything* we do,
there is an adequate hour: there is a time...
the right moment - - to marry, to travel, to begin war, to build a house.

In the time of the Preacher... the time of Solomon...

before you planned anything, you asked someone who knew about timing....
You asked a priest, an astrologer, the seer, or the Prophet.

People waited for signs... for the right season... or time,
for just about everything.

The greatest leaders of the past,
waited for the oracle announcing the appointed hour.

It **was** one of the strongest forces in human history,
from generation to generation.

Today, we do not usually ask for oracles,
but we certainly know the need for good timing.
We may live with an expectation of 'instant this' and 'instant that'...
but the wise among us still understand 'timing'.

There is a time... a time for all things....

The 'Preacher' begins his declarations in a place that is indeed **timed**...
Birth and death are... for the most part,
not ours to set a time for...

There **are** sign posts that we can do nothing about,
yet... we are challenged with responsible, and responsive actions.

The 'Preacher' requests that we acknowledge the hand of God in all things, and...
and act with compassion and justice at the right moment.

There is a time, there is a season....
this means there is time for compassion, time for kindness,
for justice, time for the honouring of others, for responsive love.

We are to be open, and be aware, and act.
We are to act at the right moment...
We are to refrain from acting in those wrong moments.

We are to live and move and act,
mindful of the presence of God and the action of the Holy Spirit.

And we are to be present in our actions ...
because there **is** a time to plant, to laugh, to dance.
And... and there is a time to up root, to cry, to mourn.

We are to decide where to put our energies and ..
where to spend our time...
we have the freedom to choose
... where will we put our energies?
... who are we following, when we act?

We will all be a part of birthing, planting, dancing...
plucking up, dying, mourning...

How we are present in those moments ... matters.
What we turn our attentions to, and how we live in those moments,
are... ours to choose...

In 1959, Pete Seeger put the words of Ecclesiastes chapter 3 to music.
He recorded his own version of it in 1962.

The song became an international hit in late 1965
when it was sung by The Byrds... reaching #1 on the *Billboard* Hot 100 chart.

The Byrds rendition of the song easily holds the record
for the number 1 hit, with the oldest lyrics.

Old ancient words, with one addition,
and addition that actually became the common title for the song.

Known as 'Turn, Turn, Turn' ...
this song helps us... I believe,
find an interesting for these ancient words.

SONG IS PLAYED ** ... lyrics at end of sermon

I don't know what Pete Seeger was thinking about when
he included the words 'turn, turn, turn....

but for me... it puts a whole new twist on Ecclesiastes.

We are invited to turn from a focus of vanity...
from pessimism and despair...

invited to turn to a place of recognizing that God,
through the coming of the kingdom.. the kin-dom...
to recognize that God elevates all time, to a fulfillment of love and prosperity.

The 'Preacher' invites us to notice that there is a season....
a time for every matter.

Pete Seeger puts melody to that profound thought and privilege....
but then invites us to pay even more attention.

To **everything** - - turn... turn... turn....
- turn to ... focus on...

He may have been using the word turn... to
mark the passage of time.... but in the turning, we are to notice.

Give your undivided attention to birth, to death,
to what you keep and what you throw away.

Be aware of what is killed, planted, danced.
Be present to the healing, gathering stones together, war and peace.

And if you can't do it all.... choose.
Turn to that which gives your life meaning and purpose.

Everything has infinite significance.
The toil of our lifetime is not lost.
It lies where God and eternity affirms it.

Jesus says " The time is fulfilled and the kingdom of God is at hand."
... in these words, God breaks into our human timing..
and something new appears.

In the light of the love of God,
found in Jesus the Christ,
each moment of every hour, day, life span...
is not lost and is not in vain .

There is a time, there is a season,
God and eternity affirms it to be so...
and we are vessels of that which is eternal.

So turn.... find you focus for this new year...
For there is a time... Is this the Time?

In the presence of the Holy One...
may it be so.

AMEN

ECCLESIASTES 3:1-8.

*Everything has its appointed hour,
there is a time for all things under heaven:
a time for birth, a time for death,
a time to plant and a time to uproot,
a time to kill, a time to heal,
a time to break down and a time to build,
a time to cry, a time to laugh,
a time to mourn, a time to dance,
a time to scatter and a time to gather,
a time to embrace, a time to refrain,
a time to seek, a time to lose,
a time to keep, a time to throw away,
a time to tear, a time to sew,
a time for silence and a time for speech,
a time for love, a time for hate,
a time for war, a time for peace.*

Turn, turn, turn by Pat Seeger

To Everything (Turn, Turn, Turn)
There is a season (Turn, Turn, Turn)
And a time to every purpose, under Heaven

A time to be born, a time to die
A time to plant, a time to reap
A time to kill, a time to heal
A time to laugh, a time to weep

To Everything (Turn, Turn, Turn)
There is a season (Turn, Turn, Turn)
And a time to every purpose, under Heaven

A time to build up, a time to break down
A time to dance, a time to mourn
A time to cast away stones, a time to gather
stones together

To Everything (Turn, Turn, Turn)
There is a season (Turn, Turn, Turn)
And a time to every purpose, under Heaven

A time of love, a time of hate
A time of war, a time of peace
A time you may embrace, a time to refrain from
embracing

To Everything (Turn, Turn, Turn)
There is a season (Turn, Turn, Turn)
And a time to every purpose, under Heaven

A time to gain, a time to lose
A time to rend, a time to sew
A time for love, a time for hate
A time for peace, I swear it's not too late

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