

“It’s Time”

Sunday, January 1, 2017

New Year’s Day

 **Ecclesiastes 3:1-15 (NRSV)**

Everything Has Its Time

For everything there is a season,
and a time for every matter under heaven:
a time to be born, and a time to die;
a time to plant, and a time to pluck up 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 throw away stones,
and a time to gather stones together;
a time to embrace, and a time to refrain from
embracing;
a time to seek, 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 for war, and a time for peace.

The God-Given Task

What gain have the workers from their toil?

I have seen the business that God has given to
everyone to be busy with.

He has made everything suitable for its time;
moreover he has put a sense of past and future
into their minds, yet they cannot find out what
God has done from the beginning to the end.

I know that there is nothing better for them than to
be happy and enjoy themselves as long as they
live; moreover, it is God's gift that all should eat
and drink and take pleasure in all their toil.

I know that whatever God does endures forever;
nothing can be added to it, nor anything taken from
it; God has done this, so that all should stand in awe
before him.

That which is, already has been; that which is to be,
already is; and God seeks out what has gone by.

This is the Word of God for the people of God.

Thanks, be to God.

[2ND Service: Affirmation of Faith]

[MESSAGE]

It's New Year's Day...Often a time when we look ahead and think...

"It's time I lost a little weight."

"It's time I got a better job."

"It's time to remodel the house."

We make big plans for the coming year;
we pledge ourselves to ambitious resolutions.

We try really hard to live up to our own
expectations, but we often fall short before June
and vow that *"next year will be different."*

Let us pray...As we begin another year of doing our
best to follow your lead, we come to your word this
morning, asking you to help us hear what you are
trying to tell us. Be with us now and guide our
study. In Jesus' name, we pray. **Amen.**

They say, *“It’s all in the timing”* and, *“Timing is everything.”*

That seems to be the message from Ecclesiastes this morning:

*“For everything there is a season,
and a time for every matter under heaven.”*

Though hotly debated in scholarly circles, the most popular theory for the authorship of this book is Solomon, a man known for his great wisdom.

This famous passage does sound very wise as it reminds us that the time of life is limited and God intends that we use our time wisely.

Its wisdom comes from the understanding that God has a plan and, in spite of the choices we make, God finds a way to work for good in all things.

The first part of this passage are poetic statements of the things that matter under heaven.

Preachers and teachers have dissected this section of Scripture for centuries, drawing parallels to the modern world.

It's true that many of these poetic verses are universally true throughout the ages.

Every person has a time to be born and another time to die; both are known only by God.

Any farmer will tell you that there is a proper time to plant and a right time to reap that which was planted.

As we work our way through the list, however, it becomes less clear what the writer is talking about because of the various ways the original language might be translated.

For example, the Hebrew words used in the line, "*a time to break down, and a time to build up,*" are often used to describe the metaphorical destruction and building up of a human life.

Instead of trying to dissect the intent of every phrase in this text, I think it is more helpful for us to realize that what Solomon is talking about is the *certainty* of **change**.

Solomon writes, *“A time to weep and a time to laugh; a time to mourn and a time to dance.”*

Both sorrow and joy are part of life; without one the other is unrecognizable.

We will encounter negative and positive emotions and experiences throughout our life.

We should expect it; change occurs constantly.

One moment we’ll be on a mountain peak,
the next moment we’ll be in the valley.

We must be able to worship God in all the differing seasons of our lives.

Is it possible to find joy when you are sick; to find dependency upon God amid failing health?

Is it possible to be close to God in ever-changing circumstances?

If you only thank God in seasons of good health and prosperity you will not be thanking God very much, because those seasons ebb and flow like the tide.

We must find joy during each season **and** in the transitions between them.

After the poem, Solomon goes on to talk about the task that God has put before us.

“I have seen the task which God has given the sons of men with which to occupy themselves. He has made everything appropriate in its time. He has also set eternity in their heart, yet so that man will not find out the work which God has done from the beginning even to the end.”

The point is: God makes everything, even events that occur through human agency, happen in its proper time.

Yet, the tension of this verse is that we don't always understand God's purposes.

We ask questions like,

Why was I born this way?

Why did my father treat me that way?

Why did you take my friend?

Why am I missing out on this blessing?

Our problem is that we focus our attention on the wrong thing.

We see the fuzzy, ugly cocoon; God plans and sets in motion the butterfly.

We see the painful, awful process; God is producing a finished product.

We see today; God is working on forever.

We get caught up in the wrapping; God focuses on the gift; what's inside.

God makes everything beautiful in its time, including your loss, your failures, your brokenness, your battles, your fragmented dreams, your lost romance, your heartache, your illness...whatever you're going through...God makes it beautiful in its time.

Without God, life is purposeless and profitless, miserable and meaningless; with God, it will ultimately make sense.

Solomon says one of the greatest responses to this life is to make the most of it.

Not that we should be selfish or foolish, but we should enjoy life by including God in all that we do and being filled with joy.

Solomon declares, *“I know that there is nothing better for them than to rejoice and to do good in one’s lifetime; moreover, that every man who eats and drinks sees good in all his labor—it is the gift of God.”*

Biblical faith is a call to joy.

Ben Franklin once said, *“Do you love life? Then do not squander time, for it is the stuff life is made of.”*

Timing truly is everything.

Let’s face it, life is stressful.

It is filled with all kinds of pressures from people, projects, pursuits, and more.

Anything can happen, for good or ill, at any moment.

So it makes sense to enjoy this life.

Eat ice cream, watch a movie, play in the rain with your kids, take your wife out to a nice dinner.

Yes, be a wise steward; there's no need to be extravagant, but make the most of your days on this earth.

At the same time, Solomon tells us to fear God.

“I know that everything God does will remain forever; there is nothing to add to it and there is nothing to take from it, for God has so worked that men should fear Him.”

God's work is permanent and complete; everything is awe-inspiring.

This concept does not refer to paralyzing terror, but rather a commitment of the total being to trust and believing the living God.

I had the opportunity to observe an open-heart surgery once.

As I gazed on God's intricate handiwork, I felt small, fearful, and awestruck.

God wants us to stand in awe of who He is and all that He is.

When we do, we will understand just how temporary this life is in contrast with an eternal God.

Today, this first day of a new year, it's time we feared God.

Will you entrust yourself to Him?

Will you depend upon Him for everything?

Will you acknowledge that His timing is everything to you?

It's time!

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. **Amen.**