

Community Church of Issaquah
Sunday, May 5, 2024

A Season for Everything

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We probably don't pay too much attention to current rock and roll music, even if it's Taylor Swift. But if we can remember back far enough, we could actually recognize the lyrics of a song, sometimes enough to sing along. When Dorothy and Allan chose to sing the song "Turn, Turn, Turn" it brought back so many memories for me. I recall so clearly when it became famous and played on every radio station (you do remember radios, don't you?) I would sing along with it each time I heard it. One day a friend said to me as I sang along, "You do know that song is from the Bible, don't you?" "No way!" I replied. That can't be." Surprisingly, that song was borrowed from the Old Testament passage we had read to us today. Yep, it's from the Bible.

The group that sang it, Bob Seeger and The Byrds, didn't have a huge number of popular songs as measured by today's standards. Even so, I still love that song and the message it brings. The words from Ecclesiastes have always spoken to me. Do you know the author of that book from the Scriptures? You might want to give the credit to Solomon, the son of David. As we either sing along or read along, we envision calendar times for these seasons or times that we read or hear. I'm not sure that was at all what Wise King Solomon had in mind. I think it was more personal than focusing on periods of time on the calendar,

even though the calendar has more significance that we give it credit. Are you aware that the month of January which begins our calendar year is named for Janus, the Greek God who had two heads, one turned backwards looking into the past and the other turned forward looking into the future?

After years of studying it and thinking about it, I believe this passage doesn't focus on the past or the future, but the present. I believe Solomon was talking about all the things we go through in our lives in the present - today. The things we have to discern from the verses and where we are in each of those times says a great deal about life being hard and not at all predictable, and also some things we thought were a certainty and some that aren't certain.

It is true that there are indeed seasons. Those are based on where the sun, the moon and the earth are in relationship to each other. Winter, Spring, Summer, and Fall are periods in our annual calendar that are usually notable and familiar. We know them well not only by the temperatures or the length of days, but by the way we dress, the way we heat our homes, the shifting of one sport to another, and so many other factors that are connected to each of those seasons. We would miss the point if we tried to insert each of those times Solomon lists into a date on our calendars. It would not be wise to try to interject those into a season.

I heard an interesting story once that I'd like to share about God's work and the seasons. It goes like this:

There is the story of a farmer in a Midwestern state who had a strong dislike for Christians and churches. As he plowed his field on Sunday mornings, he would shake his fist at the church folk driving by on their way to worship. October came and went, and the farmer had his best crop ever. When the harvest was complete, he placed an advertisement in the local newspaper which belittled and made fun of the Christians for their faith in God. This was the message in the newspaper, "Faith in God must not mean much if someone like me can prosper." The response from the Christians in the community was quiet and polite. In the same newspaper was this comment: "God doesn't always settle His accounts in October."

The purpose of the story is to simply confirm that God does not do specific works in specific time limits. In our lives, things happen in unpredictable times. If we say there is a time to be born and a time to die, we must be wise enough to know that those are simply events in our lives that do not happen only in one season of the year. There are births and deaths every day of the year. There is no limited time when births occur or when deaths happen. The meaning of the Scriptures is to make us aware that each of us will experience life events while we are on this earth. These are our life experiences, our own seasons, both good and bad.

Are there life events that I wish would never have a season? Yes. A time to kill? No. A time to tear down? No. A time to hate? Please, no. A time for war? Never. But do we get to choose whether there will be a designated time for all

these things we never want to happen? I'm sorry, but no. To simply acknowledge that those things do happen in the time of our lives is difficult enough, but to confront them is something we need God's help in doing. There are many times or seasons in the whole passage that we could spend an enormous amount of time covering. I'll only select a few that speak to me. You can perhaps take the passage home and think about the seasons in your life that have had an impact on you.

A time to be born and a time to die. It's quite obvious that each of us completed that being born part. None of us were involved in that ancestral event. I'm sure that my mother and dad were not quite prepared for the birth of a baby every July for four years in a row, resulting in there being four children for the 23-year-old parents. Birth was a life experience that came in its time or season. On the opposite side of that event, all of my siblings and I will encounter a time or season when each of us will leave this earth and move to our heavenly home. Is that unique to me or my family? No, it's a time in God's world that will come to each person.

A time to plant and a time to uproot. I'm very well-known as a man with two black thumbs. I can buy a beautiful plant at a store, take it home, and in a very short span of time, it will wither and die. It doesn't matter if I water it or fertilize it or anything else, they are scrapped in a very short period of time. That sad tale is not at all what Solomon meant in this passage. You and I engage in planting seeds that are very different that a blooming and vibrant beauty. We plant the seeds of life, implanting into

others impressions, lessons, or blessings that don't leave as botanical plants do. Have you ever thought about the seeds you have planted in your family or your friends or the church? They are done in God's season or time. But when we lose the trust or respect of another person, that seed is uprooted and like my garden, will perish. The message of Jesus was simply to plant the seeds of love. There is always a time or season for that beloved seed planting.

A time to weep and a time to laugh. I've probably told you several times that the month of May is difficult for me. Both of my parents died in this month, and both of them on Mother's Day Sunday, though five years apart. For many years, each time the month of May appeared on my calendar it would be a sad and depressing time. I would cry on Mother's Day morning just thinking about my loss. Eventually, however, I began to turn that sadness into sweet and loving memories. Thoughts of my mother often make me smile or laugh reflecting her most unusual Mother's sense of humor. There was indeed a time of weeping, but that changed to a time of laughing in time. Each of those life experiences were in their own season or time. I would be willing to guess that each of you have had that same type of change from weeping to laughing.

A time to embrace and a time to refrain from embracing. As a father, there was always a desire to "hang onto" my son to protect him or to share my love of him. As he grew and sought his independence, I struggled to let him grow up and found it hard to refrain from embracing him. In the times when he made decisions that

were harmful to him or others, I wanted to grab him and tie him down believing that if I just held on and made his decisions for him, he would learn faster. One of the most difficult things for me in being a father was letting him go and learning to love him from a distance. Have you ever found it difficult to refrain from embracing? In the times and seasons of our lives, it's a lesson we must learn the hard way.

A time to be silent and a time to speak. In our very divisive world, it would be easy for us to want to respond to all of the hurtful and differing opinions that are so opposite to our own. Coming to grips with deciding when and how to respond to others who are on such a different path, whether religious or social or political is a huge challenge. It is hard for me sometimes to bite my tongue and keep my mouth shut. It's also hard for me to know when I should speak and share my thoughts. God seeks for us to know that there are definite times to be silent and times for us to speak. Do you always know when to button up or when to blab? That is hard to know isn't it? But for everything there is a time and a season for every activity under the heavens.

The sermon today could go on and on and I could speak about each of the times Solomon talks about. But I will leave that to you. I will close with this thought: there is a time to search and a time to give up. I would encourage you to search the 3rd chapter of Ecclesiastes and see which life events you find there that you have a time and season for. Just don't give up too soon.