

A Rendering of Ecclesiastes 3:1-8 (shared in 2 voices)
First Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) - Iowa City/Coralville
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One: They call me the preacher, or the teacher, or the one I like most-the Quester. I'm a king. David's son. I'm sometimes called the wisest man ever. It's true, I asked the Lord for wisdom and it was granted me. Most of my life I've spent observing the world around me and philosophizing. Well, now, I've decided to record some of my thoughts. My first book, headed to be in the top ten of The New York Times list of best sellers is simply called "Proverbs." You want to know some commonsense jewels? Read my proverbs. I've also published a racy little love letter called "The Song of Songs." Read it....it might surprise you.

Two: Excuse me, I thought we were going to talk about time today.

One: I'm getting to that. I have to set up what I'm going to say, or it might be misunderstood. People like to take things out of context, you know. They might not be able to tell if I'm a pessimist, an optimist, a realist, or a skeptic. They might not know if I'm thinking religiously or strictly philosophically.

Two: What's the difference?

One: Exactly! The important thing is to think things through completely before you place any labels. And you have to weigh each circumstance individually. Each little piece becomes part of the whole picture and sometimes the picture changes.

Two: You're losing me.

One: OK. Like I said, I've spent a lot of time observing what goes on around me. I've kind of been on a quest to 'figure out all of life.' I've written some things down. I'm not trying to condone anything, just stating some facts; pointing out the realities of life. These are things you can't avoid. But you can enjoy them, or endure them, cope with them, and learn from them.

Two: Let's hear it then. I'm beginning to see why they call you the preacher.

One: I began to catalog vanities. By that, I mean vapors. All the meaningless stuff of life.

Two: Hence the pessimism?

One: Yes, but right in the middle I stuck this poem about time, or really timing. And wound up with some thoughts about God.

Two: Why don't you just read your poem?

One: Well, thank you, I'd love to. But I want you to feel free to comment or ask questions.

Two: Yeah, sure.

One: No really. I'm interested in any feedback. That's how I keep learning.

Two: OK, OK. Let's hear your poem. It's called 'A Time for Everything' right?

One: Right (clear throat) For everything there is a season and a time for every matter under heaven. (pause) Any comments?

Two: Nope, that's straightforward commonsense, isn't it? Trees are bare and dormant in the winter. Things like tulips and daffodils come up in the spring. Trees grow leaves. Grass turns green. Violets bloom. Birds migrate. It rains. The sun shines longer. Corn gets planted around the first of May and picked in October. Tomatoes and tornadoes develop all summer. Leaves turn color in the fall and pumpkins ripen. You dig potatoes. Birds migrate again. It snows. Of course those are just typical seasons of this part of the world.

One: Oh, please. Think a little deeper. What about seasons of our lives?

Two: Well, there's gestation, birth, infancy, toddlerhood, tweens, adolescence, teenagers, young adults, middle aged, retirement, golden years, and dying. I suppose you could call them seasons. There is a certain kind of growth in each one.

One: Deeper still, what about seasons of emotions?

Two: (slight pause) Do you mean like happiness, fear, sadness, disappointment, anger? No, those seem too temporary to be seasons. How about loneliness, contentment, anxiety, mourning, or love?

One: Now you're getting it. What about seasons of history?

Two: Sure...empires rising and falling, the industrial revolution, space age, the electronic revolution, war, peace, civil rights, those kinds of things?

One: Exactly, let me continue my poem. For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven: a time to be born, and a time to die;

(pause) Well?

Two: I assume you want me to think beyond the literal and the obvious. How about regimes, political parties, governments, nations, ideas, programs, policies, rules and regulations?

One: Good job. Next: A time to plant, and a time to pluck up what is planted.

Two: Plant seeds of hope, encouragement, knowledge, possibilities, inspiration. Pluck up weeds of prejudice, injustice, oppression, poverty, corporate greed.

One: You're getting good. A time to kill, and a time to heal.

Two: Kill incivility, rudeness, disrespect, heal hurts, resentments, trauma. Heal through reconciliation, reparation, and solutions for mutual well being.

One: You're on a roll. A time to break down, and a time to build up.

Two: Break down unfair working conditions, wages and lack of healthcare, build up people's sense of worth, belonging, and purpose.

One: I'm liking how you're thinking. A time to weep and a time to laugh.

Two: Weep over children starving, disasters striking, oil spills, deforestation, lack of affordable housing, persecution of people groups, any loss of dignity or life. Weep in joy at the beauty of Creation. Laugh when the sun bursts through clouds, at puppies, at children's jokes, when you meet a friend on the street, and at your own mistakes.

One: Now you're talking! A time to mourn, and a time to dance.

Two: Mourn when you lose love, life, limb, livelihood, or relationships. Dance when you feel like crying, when the first snowflakes begin to fall, when the Spirit says, 'dance.'

One: Oooh, I like those. A time to throw away stones, and a time to gather stones together.

Two: Let me see....throw away stones if you want to plant a garden; or if your words are figuratively stones that you throw at people, get rid of them instead. Gather stones together to build a wall or a building, to slow down erosion, or if you're stuck in the wilderness with no protection from wild animals.

One: Excellent! A time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing.

Two: It's OK to show affection with a hug, but not get carried away in public. Embrace new ideas, embrace by accepting new family members, embrace by supporting new programs. Don't embrace any and everything just for the sake of being politically correct or because of peer pressure. Don't embrace what causes harm to others. These things are getting tougher.

One: They sure are, but you are doing quite well with the challenge. A time to seek and a time to lose.

Two: Seek things you lose, like keys or your patience; seek to grow through knowledge; seek wisdom through experience; seek truth; seek to improve relationships; lose the lust for more power, more money, more possessions; lose our arrogance, our prejudices, and our self-righteousness. Ouch.

One: This is getting a little painful, isn't it? A time to keep, and a time to throw away.

Two: Keep what you use; keep good friends; keep trying; keep your promises; keep your principles; keep your commitments. Throw away clutter in your house and in your mind. Throw away evil, throw away emptiness.

One: Emptiness?

Two: Yes, anything that's lost its usefulness or meaning.

One: Wow, now you're making me think. A time to tear and a time to sew.

Two: Tear away damages in order to repair; tear yourself away from unhealthy habits; keep tearing away at a task until it's finished. Sew to create, replace, mend, join together, promote healing, or keep from fraying.

One: Very good. A time to keep silence, and a time to speak.

Two: My mom always said, "If you don't have anything good to say, don't say anything." I guess that means not to speak if it's to hurt, criticize in a bad way, or gossip. Keep silence in order to listen well. The time to speak would be in order to state an opinion, or teach, or confront with love, or encourage, or I've heard it said that if God chooses you to speak up, you don't really have a choice.

One: Absolutely. Our moms must have been related. A time to love and a time to hate.

Two: We're supposed to love ourselves and our neighbors, and God. Oh yeah, and love our enemies. So if we're busy loving everybody, when do we hate?

One: We have to go with things or concepts, not people.

Two: Like we've already mentioned then: injustice, poverty, oppression. Things like that?

One: Correct. And in this case, by hate, I mean, be willing to do something about it. Here's the last one: A time for war, and a time for peace.

Two: If you hadn't gotten me started on thinking past the first impression, I would have said the time for peace is always and the time for war is never. But there are different kinds of war, aren't there? We fight against those bad habits I mentioned, and against those things we just said we can hate. We should wage war on ignorance and crime; in fact we can wage war in a peaceful manner in a lot of areas politically, economically, and spiritually.

One: Well said. Let's not forget that we can remain peaceful internally no matter the chaos around us. Thanks for helping me. That's my poem. But I'd like to share a little more...

We all use phrases like losing time, gaining time, wasting time, spending time, killing time, saving time, investing time, measuring time, filling time, racing against time, and it's about time!

The book of Ecclesiastes is a provocative, interesting read, especially as Eugene

Petersen translates it in the Message. It's a piece of what is known as wisdom literature and it covers all of the above. The author is on a quest: to figure out everything. He includes in his poem 28 seasons of life.

The Quester is sure that both the desire to find out and the limitations he has in understanding everything are ordained by God.

The end result is the overall theme and conclusion that the only thing that makes life, or our time here on earth, worthwhile is to fear the Lord. That fear includes respect, awe, obedience, and enjoyment of a relationship with God.

We humans invented the calendar to mark the passing of time.

For this church's congregation, the next 3 months will be a time of rest and revival for some; and a time of using gifts and talents more fully for others. It will be a time of experimentation, perhaps trying some new routines, while holding fast to treasured traditions. We will not fear adventurous possibilities in our ministry. We will take care not to chase after smoke, or vanities. A sit down read of Ecclesiastes could serve to cleanse our souls so that we are made more ready for God's Spirit to move us deeper into God's will.

May we consider each day a gift, open it with delighted expectation and gratitude, use it well, and seek balance in the seasons and times of our life. Amen.

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