

## **September 13th: A New Season**

My friends, welcome to our new fall series, and welcome to a new season.

As we shift into Fall, and all that this different phase of our year entails, we know these transitions can have a powerful impact on our spiritual lives and on our souls. Our bodies, minds, and spirits are sensitive to change—and yet change is one of the only constants in our world. So this series is an attempt to offer language, support, and encouragement for those transitions that might be occurring in our lives. As we navigate these moments together, we'll be relying on passages from Old Testament wisdom literature to guide us—these texts, stories, and sayings will hopefully speak to our needs for reassurance and clarity. Wherever you are on your faith journey, we invite you to join this conversation and space for reflection.

To start this topic, we are going to take a closer look at a passage of scripture that I hope will offer us some wisdom. Before we begin, let's take a moment to pray together.

*Eternal God, your holy word reminds us that there is a time for everything. At every stage of our lives, and in every different season, you invite us to trust in your divine timing. We enter into this moment of transition eager to receive your guidance and care. Attune our souls to your presence in this sacred space, open our hearts to your wise voice and comforting embrace. Speak to us through the writings of your faithful people, and prepare us for the challenges and joys that are in front of us. Amen.*

Time is a funny thing, is it not? I swear that as I get older, time seems to get faster and faster. The summers of my childhood stretched out impossibly long, like an vast, endless sea of infinite possibilities, but now, I feel like I blinked, and summer disappeared. It feels like it was June just yesterday, and I was pulling out my shorts and summer linen pants, and now it's almost time to put them away. Where did the time go? Where did it go?

I admit that I'm more than a little grieved about this—the summer season just went by too fast, I barely had a chance to stop and savor those moments of late sunsets, fresh garden tomatoes, and gentle beach breezes. I barely had a chance to sink into the season we were in, and now it's slipped through my fingers. And truthfully, I'll probably feel the same way about the fall, once it's all over.

Perhaps you feel this way too, or are noticing a similar feeling in your own life. Perhaps you are also sensing the acceleration of our lives, the years speeding by faster and faster. Perhaps you're also grieving the loss of our ability to be present with ourselves and each other in the midst of packed schedules and overwhelming responsibilities. Perhaps you're also wondering how we can enjoy the time we have before it's gone. Perhaps you are also not quite ready for the new season that is in front of us—you're feeling the mismatch between the days on the calendar and the feelings in your soul. If any of those things resonated with you, you're not alone.

So this morning, we're going to wrestle with this concept of time. To start us off, we're going to differentiate between different kinds of time—because in the minds of our ancient ancestors, there was a distinction between the time on a clock and the way that we perceive it. In ancient Greece, they employed two words for time: “chronos,” and “kairos.” Chronos was used to refer to an understanding of time that was quantitative, it could be measured by hours, days, weeks, or years. Chronos was linear, meaning that it was forward moving and sequential—things happened in a specific order at a steady pace. By contrast, kairos was an understanding of time as flexible and qualitative—it was experienced and expressed through moments of meaning and significance. Within kairos, time was thought about as certain periods or specifically anointed occasions—in the ancient mind, there was the perfect time to plow a field, the right time to begin a journey, or a critical time for an army to advance.

Because we might not be used to these two perspectives on time, here's an example to help us understand. Imagine you need to take your three children

under the age of ten on a road trip. You pull out your map, or plug the coordinates into your GPS, and you discover that you need to drive a minimum of 1000 miles, not counting any stops you might need to take for bathroom breaks, snacks, or sightseeing. If you were thinking of this in terms of chronos, you might ask: how long will this take? How many hours will we be on the road? How many nights will we need to stop? But if you were thinking of this trip in terms of kairos, you might ask: how long will this drive feel? Will I have any sanity left at the end of it? How many times will we need to listen to the Moana soundtrack before I scream?

See, a big difference!

Ultimately, both chronos and kairos are important. Chronos keeps us on time to work, on time for doctor's appointments, and ready for daylight savings time. We can't escape chronos, we can't stop the clock, although sometimes we probably wish we could. However, the good news is that kairos can be more open to interpretation, because kairos can be more connected to our individual experience of time. When we apply a kairos perspective to our lives, it keeps us attuned to shifts in seasons, new feelings that emerge as things around us change, and wisdom about how to move forward. When we see our days through the lens of kairos, it can deepen our experience, help us to build memories, and allow us to reflect on the past while preparing for the future.

As our congregation settles into the rhythm of meeting week by week, and observing the passing of months, we will experience the linear nature of chronos, but I'd also like to invite us to be intentional about paying attention to the kairos in our midst. And that's why this series is going to be talking about life as having seasons—or as Taylor Swift might call them, eras—occasions that we fade into and out of rather than defined beginnings and endings. Seasons can be subtle shifts, or they can be something we find ourselves in abruptly and unexpectedly. Seasons can be nebulous, hard to describe—or they can be a time that is more universal, tied to a specific age, decade, or portion of our human lives. I think we'll discover that perhaps each of us is in multiple seasons at once, and we'll need to grapple with how to juggle competing or

conflicting realities. We might learn that while chronos time only moves in one direction, there are overlapping and ongoing situations that define our lives but defy the boundaries of our calendar.

To help us navigate this, each Sunday in this series will have a specific theme, and we'll use that theme to talk about a feeling or experience of time, and the emotions or spiritual insights that we might find there. Hopefully this will invite us into divine mystery, spark our curiosity about ourselves and each other, and empower us to be faithful no matter what it is that we're going through.

Of course, we'll need a guide—and so we're going to be reading from wisdom literature—a category of Old Testament texts that I think is particularly attuned to divine kairos. In this style of writing, the emphasis isn't necessarily on recording exact historical events, or telling a specific story—instead, wisdom literature invites us to reflect on our lives and discern how to apply these ancient lessons and advice. As a literary category, it predates the Bible, but within our biblical canon, it functions as a moral and spiritual guide—letting each generation of Jews and then later, Christians, wrestle with larger questions about human identity, the meaning of life, the purpose of faith, and how to engage well with each other. Wisdom literature is the perfect place to look for guidance when we are lost, confused, disoriented, or just searching for the right path.

Today, as we start this journey, we're starting out in a funny book called Ecclesiastes, which our biblical tradition ascribes to King Solomon, the leader of God's people during the 10th century BCE. The name Ecclesiastes comes from a Greek word meaning "Teacher," and each passage within this book of wisdom is intended to challenge the audience into deeper introspection and life long learning. So if you have your Bibles with you, you are welcome to take them out now and find that text. We'll take a look at the first chapter of that book later in our series, but this morning, we're going to look at a portion of chapter 3.

Our passage starts with this declarative statement: “There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under the heavens.” We might think to ourselves, a time for everything? Really? What’s included in our biblical author’s definition of everything?

Well, our biblical author elaborates, claiming that there’s:

“a time to be born and a time to die,  
a time to plant and a time to uproot,  
a time to kill and a time to heal,  
a time to tear down and a time to build,  
a time to weep and a time to laugh,  
a time to mourn and a time to dance,  
a time to scatter stones and a time to gather them,  
a time to embrace and a time to refrain from embracing,  
a time to search and a time to give up,  
a time to keep and a time to throw away,  
a time to tear and a time to mend,  
a time to be silent and a time to speak,  
a time to love and a time to hate,  
a time for war and a time for peace.”

What does a list like this mean? How should we understand and apply this piece of wisdom? Well, here’s what I think this passage is saying to us–

Our human lives are multifaceted, multidimensional experiences. Our years on this planet, whether they are many or few, are a wide range of events—including both joys and sorrows. The high and the lows are to be expected, they are a natural feature of what it means to be part of God’s creation. These inherent ebbs and flows are not something to be afraid of, they are as divinely inspired as the tides or the clouds. We might try to avoid certain experiences or emotions, but there are some things we can’t control, some experiences and emotions that are hardwired into us, woven into the fabric of our souls.

Therefore, we should expect to experience everything that this world has to offer—both the good and the bad. We shouldn't be surprised when we encounter the full spectrum of humanity—everything from birth to death, grief to celebration, the abundance of growth to the barrenness of harvest. None of these seasons last forever, and these experiences come and go. We shouldn't judge ourselves if we find ourselves in certain seasons, and we shouldn't compare our own journey to the journeys of others—my path will not be your path, and your path will not be my path. This variety of experiences should be a sign for us that we are each wholly participating in life, not a sign that we are broken or somehow defective.

I know that many of us are probably not excited about experiencing seasons of pain, sadness or death. It is probably not very inspiring to hear that these realities will be part of our lives whether we like it or not. But verse 11 of this passage has something for us to consider, a *kairos* perspective that we might need to hear. Our biblical author acknowledges that these seasons can feel like a burden that God has placed on us, but he also writes, "He has made everything beautiful in its time. He has also set eternity in the human heart; yet no one can fathom what God has done from beginning to end."

This doesn't mean that every season will feel beautiful while we're in it, but this verse invites us to see our lives from a larger vantage point—to see these seasons in the context of God's unending faithfulness to us and love for us. When we look at our life this way, we might see that God is present with us in every season, God is drawing near to us at every stage. And this care and compassion for humanity means that we have a source of comfort that we can turn to—we have a Creator who wants to be our guide and traveling companion. Walking with God and focusing on this promise of eternity can help us to build spiritual resilience, a skill that allows us to experience life's highs and lows without fear or existential dread.

And speaking of existential dread, the book of Ecclesiastes is sometimes compared to the philosophical beliefs of nihilism—the view that nothing really matters and that there is no larger meaning or purpose to our lives. I think our

biblical author wrestles with the lack of control that we might feel regarding our circumstances, but ultimately, he completely rejects this idea that our lives are senseless and unimportant—choosing instead to believe that our faith helps us create the meaning and purpose that we are desperately seeking. Our faith guides us towards significance, it gives us direction and larger goals that are worth living for. Our faith actually fills our lives with substance, reminding us what is truly important and worthwhile.

This passage, and in particular, verse 11 gives me hope that even if I don't fully understand the season I'm in right now, or even if I'm struggling to adapt to changes in my life, there is beauty to be found. God is working behind the scenes, making something new and beautiful, and it is my job to look for it. Even if I feel uncomfortable, or like I'm being challenged, I can discover something new about myself or about God that will guide me forward. Even if I am discouraged or lost, I try to trust that eventually, there will be something to celebrate. And this is my hope for you as well. I hope that you will find meaning and purpose as you navigate the unique path in front of you.

My friends, I'll close with this: the Teacher of Ecclesiastes invites us to consider that the seasons of our lives will be teachers in their own way if we enter them with open hearts and open minds.

This week, as you reflect on the changes and transitions of your own life, I invite you to return to this passage and engage with this idea that our lives are meant to be diverse and dynamic. I invite you to consider how the season you find yourself in right now is the *kairos* time that God has promised you—the right time to learn, grow, and be faithful. And I invite you to pay attention to where God is already moving and present—he is with you now and will be with you forever.

Amen.