

“Growing through the Seasons”  
Sermon by Lisa Crismore  
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Ecclesiastes 3:1-13

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. 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.

When I returned from Spain last week, I was amazed that in the 2 weeks of being gone that the leaves have definitely started to turn and fall has begun. The farmers are out in the fields gathering the corn and the soybeans. People are posting pictures on Facebook of trips to the pumpkin patch and of freshly carved jack-o-lanterns. The season is changing from the warm summer days into the cool autumn days. Time never stands still. It keeps on moving forward.

Our lives are scheduled around the clock. When I was visiting newborn Aiden Tunkara this week in the hospital, the nurse wanted to know the last time Esther had fed him and changed his diaper so she could record the time in his chart. From the time we are born to the time that we die, our lives are centered around time. We have appointments and deadlines. When we go to school, students follow a class schedule. We celebrate birthdays and holidays at various times of the year. As we get older, we have to take medication, which is prescribed to be taken at certain times of the day. Many of us need a pill compartment box that is marked by the days and am/pm so we can keep track of when we take them.

In our scripture in Ecclesiastes, we hear about time today. This is probably the only scripture that we are familiar with hearing from this book in the Bible. Many of you probably remember the popular song in 1965 that the Byrds sang that had this scripture in it almost word for word, called “Turn, Turn, Turn.”

The Rev. Dr. Joanna Adams gives insight into the book of Ecclesiastes and the time that it was written. She says, “There was an ancient teacher of wisdom who was called in Hebrew Qohelet (Quo-hel-la – teacher or preacher). The name in Greek is translated “Ecclesiastes.” This wise person understood time quite differently from the way it is understood today. He wrote after the Babylonian Exile, an experience that had taught the Hebrew people that human experience was never going to be an uninterrupted walk in the park and that time should not be a tyrant that demanded all our allegiance. Some see Ecclesiastes as the ultimate cynic. There is some truth to that. Thirty-eight times throughout the course of the book entitled *Ecclesiastes*, the wisdom writer says, “All is vanity.” I would call him more of a realist than a cynic, a practical theologian who refused to look at life through rose-colored glasses and wanted those to whom he spoke not to wear rose-colored glasses themselves.” ([http://day1.org/1677-should\\_there\\_be\\_a\\_clock\\_in\\_the\\_sanctuary](http://day1.org/1677-should_there_be_a_clock_in_the_sanctuary) - Rev. Dr. Joanna Adams; 2010)

As we read and hear these 28 things about time and what the seasons of our lives offer us, we hear tension. Do you hear it – birth – death; plant – pluck-up; kill – heal; tear – mend; keep – throw

away; silence – speak; seek – lose (cut your losses); weep – laugh; mourn – dance; love – hate; war – peace? There is pulling back and forth and it is like a friction or wrestling match. I would almost argue with Joanna Adams and say that I think that the way the writer of Ecclesiastes understood time is what many of us experience today. I don't know about you but I feel the friction. I need to hear what scripture is telling me.

Why do I need to hear it? When I am caught up in the tension, I tend to look toward the future rather than staying in the moment. When I am mourning, weeping, losing, throwing away, killing an idea, being at war and fighting for a certain cause – those are times when I struggle with living in the present. I want to dwell on the past when things were good or think about the positive events that our planned for my life in the future. Yet, God is calling – teaching us that we must live in today no matter what the situation.

Do any of you remember the movie Pleasantville? It was a television show based on a fictional place called Pleasantville, where everything was pleasant. The sun always shined, everything happened the same way every day. No one got angry or disagreed with anyone. Then one day, two siblings played by Toby Maguire and Reese Witherspoon are taken from the real world and put into the television program of Pleasantville against their will. They begin to wreak havoc with the people of the town and the seam of pleasantness it ripped open. But in the midst of the reality of push and pull – friction, vibrant color begins to appear. Life truly happens.

Do I think God wants us to suffer? NO! No, God does not want us to suffer. This lesson in Ecclesiastes teaches us that there will be times in our life, which will be filled with various struggles and triumphs. Some people will have more than others. Why? I don't know. But, I do believe that God is with us through it all. We are to learn and grow throughout the seasons of our life with whatever comes our way.

The Message version says this in verses 9-13 “True, God made everything beautiful in itself and in its time—but he's left us in the dark, so we can never know what God is up to, whether he's coming or going. I've decided that there's nothing better to do than go ahead and have a good time and get the most we can out of life. That's it—eat, drink, and make the most of your job. It's God's gift.”

Many of you know that I just got back from walking on the Camino de Santiago in Spain. My trip on September 29 did not start out as I had planned. For those of you on Facebook, you know that my flight got canceled because of airplane maintenance which I was thankful that they found this out before we got over the ocean. But, this meant that my arrival in Spain would be delayed a day and I missed my connecting flight in Madrid. Now, I have to be honest and tell you that I was very disappointed especially after they waited to almost midnight to tell us this. But after getting a good night's rest, which the airlines paid for a hotel room, I was able to step back and look at it in a different light. This death of my original schedule gave me the opportunity to rethink my plans and actually it turned out for the best. I gave up 50 miles of additional walking which my body appreciated and gave myself an extra day to recover from jet-lag.

The other thing that I have reflected on is the day that I walked 4 hours in the rain. It was cold and wet. Even though I had a cover for my backpack and a nice raincoat that gave me almost full coverage, many parts of my body were still soaked! My hands were all shriveled and looked like I had been in the bathtub for hours. We only walked a little over 10 miles that day but the rain slowed everything down. There were no cafes or places to stop to get out of it. The word “MISERABLE” comes to mind. Those 4 hours in the rain made me appreciate and be grateful for the other 7 days leading up to it that were beautiful. I don't think I would have realized the gift of sunshine in the same way if I had not had the rain.

My sister-in-law celebrated her retirement from teaching yesterday. I am sure she is feeling the time of loss of friendships, the tearing down and packing up a classroom of years of materials, the mourning of the identity of being a teacher and the relationships with students. But, this will also be a time of birth as she sees what new adventures God has planned for her; a time to plant new seeds to see what will sprout forth; a time to dance for freedom to explore life.

We celebrate the gift of time that God gives us today. How will we receive the gift?

Frederick Buechner "Today"

It is a moment of light surrounded on all sides by darkness and oblivion. In the entire history of the universe, let alone in your own history, there has never been another just like it and there will never be another just like it again. It is the point to which all your yesterdays have been leading since the hour of your birth. It is the point from which all your tomorrows will proceed until the hour of your death. If you were aware of how precious it is, you could hardly live through it. Unless you were aware of how precious it is, you can hardly be said to be living at all.

"This is the day which the Lord has made," says Psalm 118. "Let us rejoice and be glad in it" (v. 24). Or weep and be sad in it for that matter. The point is to see it for what it is, because it will be gone before you know it. If you waste it, it is your life that you're wasting. If you look the other way, it may be the moment you've been waiting for always that you're missing.

All other days have either disappeared into darkness and oblivion or not yet emerged from it.

Today is the only day there is. (Beyond Words – Daily Readings in the ABC's of Faith; Frederick Buechner; Harper San Francisco; 2004; p. 389-390)

There's an opportune time to do things, a right time for everything on the earth:

A right time for birth and another for death,  
A right time to plant and another to reap,  
A right time to kill and another to heal,  
A right time to destroy and another to construct,  
A right time to cry and another to laugh,  
A right time to lament and another to cheer,  
A right time to make love and another to abstain,  
A right time to embrace and another to part,  
A right time to search and another to count your losses,  
A right time to hold on and another to let go,  
A right time to rip out and another to mend,  
A right time to shut up and another to speak up,  
A right time to love and another to hate,  
A right time to wage war and another to make peace.

But in the end, does it really make a difference what anyone does? I've had a good look at what God has given us to do—busywork, mostly.