

Pastor T.C. Arnold
New Year's Eve
Ecclesiastes 3
December 31st, 2014

"For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven..." King Solomon introduces the poem we spoke responsively by describing changing human affairs and God's unchanging will. Throughout the entire book of Ecclesiastes Solomon frequently changes his tone, describing both the frustrations of life and the firmness of God's Word and blessing.

Martin Luther said this about what we hear in this third chapter: "All human works and efforts have a certain and definite time of acting of beginning, and of ending, beyond human control... It is not up to us to prescribe the time, the manner, or the effect of things that are to be done... Everything comes and goes at the time that God has appointed."

So, there is a time to be born and a time to die... and all the rest of it... weeping, mourning, embracing, seeking, keeping, tearing, loving, etc. These times are appointed by God. And with that, we are both relieved and frustrated.

Our times are appointed by God and that is a relief. A relief for the very reasons you already know. The Lord knows your times. He knows your days. He knows your troubles and He know exactly what to do about it. He knows better than us because He has already ordered our days and our nights. This is a relief, because with God, nothing is left to chance. He knew your beginning of days before you began. And He knows our last day... and how He will keep you in the palm of His hand until that day is realized by us. *"For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven."* God knows it. And thank God, God knows.

Yet, at the same time, while we take comfort in knowing that God orders our days and nights, humanly speaking, leaving our times to God is very frustrating. You know why... Because you think you know better for yourself. Control is one of the traits in life we believe we cannot do without. "If you want it done right, you have to do it yourself," we have heard it said time and time again. This may be true humanly speaking. What is probably a truer statement sounds more like this... "If you want it done the way you want it done, then, you probably should just do it yourself." Our problem is that we cannot differentiate between, "doing it the way WE want it done," and "doing it right." When "doing it" is not "our way" then we feel as if we have lost control. If we have lost control, then we get anxious, frustrated, even scared. When all this happens, we try our best to take back what we lost. And it is a helpless feeling when we are not in control.

Our old sinful nature is the control freak in our lives. We love to take things away from God, make them our own, make ourselves lord over matters that pertain to time, to seasons, and to every matter under heaven. In our old sinful self, we play god when we delete God from our time, seasons and every matter under heaven.

2015. How is it possible? Another year come and gone? How did you do? How did you do "controlling" time and seasons this past year? God gave you a free will. You used it, I'm sure. I know I did. I made decisions, I made choices. So did you. With such things we take on the illusion that God has left us alone to deal with whatever matters come up in our own lives. You know, we have a God that came down and made everything around us and then retreated back into the utter reaches of the universe never to be seen again. You are in control. God has nothing to do with it.

Beloved, even in our choices, God orders the time of our days and our nights. Take comfort in that. Take comfort in knowing that God knows – even when we believe the time is wrong, the Lord never leaves you alone. Those words from Ecclesiastes are made for comfort.

When it says, there is “*a time for every matter under the heaven,*” it means that there is a time that God has appointed – that God remains with His children – that God remains in control – that God is saying to you and to me, “*never will I leave you and never will I forsake you.*”

Dear friends in Christ, the fact that God says there is a time for everything is not meant to cause great fear because we will not be in control. No, these words are comfort for us to know that we are never alone. The Lord has a plan and there is a time. There is a time, in God’s eternal plan for every matter under heaven. You are under heaven. God’s time – His precious time – includes you.

Our time is ending... for 2014 that is. Perhaps you have had the opportunity to reflect on what happened. If you have not, do that between now and the stroke of midnight. It might even be helpful to discuss with someone else all the little details about what made this past year great. Beloved, see the Lord’s hand and how He ordered your time – at just the right time – in those tremendous blessings. I hope you will be able to remember something tonight as you reflect on this year now almost spent, that you didn’t see as a time when God was working it out in a way you didn’t understand. Maybe what you remember is how the Lord came along side of you each of your days – as we took the advice of the prophet Moses when he spoke one of his final blessings to the children of Israel, “*so as your days are, so shall your strength be.*” Where does that strength come from – for each day – the only day our Lord gives us right now? It comes from the Lord, of course. It comes at this time, the right time, the time God appoints.

And God has appointed you to 2015 as well. Here we are just hours away now. “*For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under the son.*” Never forget those words. When our days before us feel bogged down as we wait on God, don’t forget, He has not forgotten you. For everything there is a time and a season. It’s true. It’s that way for everything under heaven.

So for our 2015, let’s make time for God, as He has surely made all the time for you. Let’s meet together in the Lord’s house, let’s invite our friends and family. And let’s take it to heart this year, God’s seasons – His time – always includes us in His ever-present care for those He loves. He desires to share His good news with you – He desires to have you here being fed with His precious body and blood for the forgiveness of your sins.

2015 will be the year for you and your Lord. You will be a part of it – another year. And the Lord will order it. Thank God He will. He makes good on these promises for you. May God richly bless you and keep in this year to come. May the Lord bless your service, may He bless His church, and may He keep us ever mindful each of our days – “*For everything there is a season and a time for every matter under heaven.*” Amen

The peace of God which passes all understanding shall keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.