

Title: A Time for Every Purpose under Heaven

*“To everything (turn, turn, turn)  
There is a season (turn, turn, turn)  
And a time to every purpose, under heaven.”*

And now it is time for me to retire for the third and hopefully the last time. I never sought to leave retirement. Each time, I was asked. The first time I retired was as rector of Our Saviour. Shortly after that, I was called by the Executive Director and the Clinical Director of Snowline Hospice and asked if I wanted to work full-time for them.

After three years, it was time for me to retire again. I had already given two months' notice when Karen+ announced her retirement. I was then asked to be your interim. I did get four weeks of retirement, in between. And so here we are again. There is a time to every purpose under heaven.

The song that the Byrds made popular was written by Pete Seager in the late 50s. And Pete Seager put very little work into the lyrics. They are almost verbatim from Ecclesiastes 3:1-8. See – the Old Testament is important.

*“A time to be born, a time to die.”*

In the words of Terry Gilliam in the “Holy Grail”, “But I’m not dead yet!” For us, death is birth. In fact, our lives are a series of births. We are born when we take our first breath and receive the *ruah*: breath, wind, and spirit. We again receive the *ruah* Spirit at baptism. Today we will see Letti marked as Christ’s own forever. When we give up the *ruah* at death, our *ruah* spirit is joined with God and we are born yet again.

*“A time to plant, a time to reap.”*

Jesus often used agriculture metaphors for the kingdom of God. It is a metaphor for evangelism. Some reap where they did not sow. We gather on Sundays to reap where we did not sow. We did not plant the wheat. We did not plant the vines. Yet we partake of the bread and wine. God sows the body and blood of Christ and we reap that holy mystery in our bodies.

*“A time to kill, a time to heal.”*

Is there a time to kill? World War II? Sometimes we need to kill to heal. Such as cancer surgery and chemotherapy. Our Presiding Bishop will have his cancerous prostate removed. God's goal for us is total healing: physically, mentally, emotionally, spiritually. This will come in the next life. But everything we do to promote and make happen total healing now gives us signs of the kingdom of God.

*"A time to laugh, a time to weep."* (fin)

I don't recall a funeral reception where there wasn't laughter and weeping in the same room at the same time. In the face of sadness, we remember fondly the good times and the humorous ones. We can hold those things at the same time.

*"A time to build up, a time to break down."*

Today, we hold the people of Redding in our prayers. We weep with them in their overwhelming loss. Sometimes we choose to break down that which no longer functions as it should. Sometimes, beyond our control, a wildfire breaks down our homes and livelihoods. The people of Shasta County will rebuild. There are many others who are in the same situation.

*"A time to dance, a time to mourn."*

You know – dance can express many emotions. But it is likely that the author of Ecclesiastes is contrasting celebration with formal mourning. In other cultures and in ancient times, there were formal mourning periods of time. Dancing would not be allowed. However, I can imagine a professional dancer using dance to express her or his mourning.

*"A time to cast away stones, a time to gather stones together."* (fin)

In the ancient Middle East, stones were used to build altars, buildings, and walls. Gathering stones would be necessary to do that, casting away those stones that would not be suitable. Without that discernment, that which is built would fail. I'm assuming the author is encouraging good discernment. Maybe like deciding what priest a parish may call.

*“A time of love, a time of hate.”*

Jesus calls us to love. However, we can and do get feelings of hate and anger. It's okay to be angry. It is what we do with that anger that matters. I think Jesus made love a commandment, because we choose to love or not love. We can decide to love or not love. We can decide to love when we hate.

*“A time of war, a time of peace.”*

I dream of a time when world leaders understand that nobody wins a war. It can be a shooting war or a trade war. Again, World War II might be an exception when there was overwhelming evil. After Germany and Japan were defeated, in peacetime they became allies. Right now, there are battles being fought against killer fires.

*“A time you may embrace, a time to refrain from embracing.” (fin)*

The Ecclesiastes author doesn't specify what is or is not embraced, presumably a person. But who knows? Maybe it was meant to be whatever or whoever we may think of. Maybe the author was thinking of retirement. I had refrained from embracing retirement. It is now time for me to embrace it.

*“A time to gain, a time to lose.”*

Loss is a part of life. There is a part of me that I will lose after we leave you all. I will certainly gain time freedom. Life is tradeoffs. There is a 60s song, “Five O'clock World,” where a verse is after 5:00, “no one owns a piece of my time.” Except, in the song the singer is married so that is not exactly true.

*“A time to rend, a time to sew.”*

Sometimes a garment must be rent or torn before it is re sewn. That also applies to us. We sometimes have to tear down part of us to rebuild it better than it was before.

*“A time for love, a time for hate. A time for peace, I swear it’s not too late.”*  
(fin)

In our Ephesians reading, Paul is praying asking that Christ dwell in their hearts. The main ingredient for Christ dwelling with us is faith. Without faith, we cannot recognize Christ within us.

This indwelling of Christ is part of the process of being grounded in love. As the song says, “They will know that we are Christians by our love.” What made the Ephesian church attractive to others and what makes any church attractive to outsiders is when a church is a place of love and that love is rooted in the community.

We decide to love. We decide to have peace. It is never too late.

*“To everything (turn, turn, turn)  
There is a season (turn, turn, turn)  
And a time to every purpose, under heaven.”*

I could attempt to leave you with words of advice and encouragement, but Paul did it a lot better than I could as he was closing his letter to the Romans.

Paul said, “Let love be genuine; hate what is evil, hold fast to what is good; love one another with mutual affection; outdo one another in showing honor. Do not lag in zeal, be ardent in spirit, serve the Lord.<sup>e</sup> Rejoice in hope, be patient in suffering, persevere in prayer. Contribute to the needs of the saints; extend hospitality to strangers.

“Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them. Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep. Live in harmony with one another; do not be haughty but associate with the lowly;<sup>f</sup> do not claim to be wiser than you are. Do not repay anyone evil for evil, but take thought for what is noble in the sight of all. If it is possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all.

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<sup>e</sup> Other ancient authorities read *serve the opportune time*

<sup>f</sup> Or *give yourselves to humble tasks*

“Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave room for the wrath of God;<sup>g</sup> for it is written, ‘Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord.’ No, ‘if your enemies are hungry, feed them; if they are thirsty, give them something to drink; for by doing this you will heap burning coals on their heads.’ Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.” (Romans 12:9-21)

Text: **Ecclesiastes 3:1–8** (NRSV)

**3** For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven:

- <sup>2</sup> a time to be born, and a time to die;
- a time to plant, and a time to pluck up what is planted;
- <sup>3</sup> a time to kill, and a time to heal;
- a time to break down, and a time to build up;
- <sup>4</sup> a time to weep, and a time to laugh;
- a time to mourn, and a time to dance;
- <sup>5</sup> a time to throw away stones, and a time to gather stones together;
- a time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing;
- <sup>6</sup> a time to seek, and a time to lose;
- a time to keep, and a time to throw away;
- <sup>7</sup> a time to tear, and a time to sew;
- a time to keep silence, and a time to speak;
- <sup>8</sup> a time to love, and a time to hate;
- a time for war, and a time for peace. <sup>1</sup>

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<sup>g</sup> Gk *the wrath*

<sup>1</sup> [\*The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version\*](#). (1989). (Ec 3:1–8). Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers.#