

## **“A Time For All Things”**

Ecclesiastes 3:1-13

January 1, 2006 – the Seventh Day of Christmas

the Rev. Todd R. Goddard, pastor

[Zion West Walworth United Methodist Church](#)



### **Ecclesiastes 3:1-13**

<sup>1</sup>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>9</sup>What gain have the workers from their toil? <sup>10</sup>I have seen the business that God has given to everyone to be busy with. <sup>11</sup>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. <sup>12</sup>I know that there is nothing better for them than to be happy and enjoy themselves as long as they live; <sup>13</sup>moreover, it is God's gift that all should eat and drink and take pleasure in all their toil.

Prayer.

It would appear that the author of Ecclesiastes, a prophet by the name Qohelet, has given us the license to recognize the changing of the year, from 2005 to this new year, 2006. For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven.

Qohelet wrote this book to the ecclesia, the congregation of Israel, to give meaning about life. It is a book of ideas; ideas to address real issues confronting people of faith. He recognizes that human achievement is weak and short lived, that our earthly fate is uncertain, that there will always remain mysterious and unknowable characteristics of the world, and that it is a divine imperative for us to express joy and thanksgiving. Around these four themes, the book of Ecclesiastes is written.

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For a moment, let us look back at 2005. From a perspective of human suffering, the year 2005 has been a global disaster. From tsunami destruction, to hurricane devastation, and to earthquake desolation, this past year has been one of global catastrophe. Questions about why? or suggestions about apocalyptic retribution are posed by theological lightweights and harsh fundamentalists alike; neither of which lend themselves to any meaningful response. The most helpful response comes from people of faith who respond to Jesus' imperative to love our neighbors as much as we love ourselves.

As if natural disasters were not enough, human initiated catastrophes have brought violence to every corner of the globe. Rape, torture, and murder continue to be the agenda of thugs, dictators, and empire builders. Human rights violations, discrimination, and hatred have led to ethnic cleansing and genocide. Economic injustice and a growing divide between the rich and the poor have become increasingly worse. Have we not learned the painful lessons of history? Why are these words like torture, genocide, and starvation still in our vocabulary?

The Christian response resonates from our baptismal vows, either made by us or on our behalf: do you renounce the spiritual forces of wickedness, reject the evil powers of this world, and repent of your sin? Do you accept the freedom and power God gives you to resist evil, injustice, and oppression in whatever forms they present themselves? But let us be honest; the Christian response has been anemic at best, and non-existent in many instances.

It is not the role of government or business to be the moral authority in the world. Jesus' directive to "render unto to Caesar that which is Caesar's and render unto God that which is God's" should make us passionate about keeping Church and state separated. It is the role of Christians, and people of faith, to lend our moral compass to an impassioned effort to reject evil, resist injustice, and to bring an end to all oppression. We should not and can not rest until all the world is cleansed of sin, injustice and oppression and the Kingdom of God is established on earth as it is in heaven.

Christ's Church has not remained unscathed or unassaulted in 2005. Competing agenda threaten to steal the focus of Christian living, and they result in a weakening of the Church universal. Issues of abortion and homosexuality are not of primary concern to people of faith. Yet, to the innocent bystander, it would appear as if the Church was fixated on these concerns alone, to the neglect of every other concern. Jesus came and reached out to the poor, the marginalized, the ostracized of his day. Our primary concern should be to live the way Jesus did, to follow his example, to love as he has loved.

Are we not all condemned by our sin? Is there any sin that is worse than the sin you or I have committed in our lives? No. Then let us get off our righteous high horse, leave the condemnation and justification to God, and get back to the hard work of Christian mission and ministry - living the way Jesus desires his disciples to live.

The news of 2005 has not all been bad. From a local point of view, many blessings have

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come out of our congregation. We've been giving a higher percentage to the missions and ministry of Christ than ever before in the history of our congregation. An environment of permission giving has been established, nurtured, and strengthened. This allows more disciples to recognize the gifts that God has given; and then it gives the freedom to put those gifts and talents to good use. The members and friends of Zion are encouraged to put talents to work for the benefit of God and his Kingdom, be those talents the ability to quilt, mow, build, sing, play, pray, teach, cook, organize, speak out, or reach out. For every talent, God has a purpose and a plan.

For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven. So where does this leave us for 2006?

If we are to call ourselves Christians, and if we are to be known as disciples of Jesus Christ, then I believe this change from one year to a new year is an opportunity to return to the essentials of our faith, which are simply this:

- Living in Covenant with our God
- Following the Commandments of our God
- and Loving according to the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

We are children of the Covenant God made with our ancestors; Abraham, his family, and his descendants. God has claimed us as God's own. God has promised to bless us and all of our descendants. All we have or need has been promised to us. All we have to do is to remain connected to God, adhere to the Covenant, and to live according to God's grace. It is as simple as that. It doesn't take a lot of effort to remain in relationship with our God who desires to remain in relationship with us.

In 2006, let each of us be so resolved ... to live in Covenant with our God.

God has given us laws to follow. Not many; just enough to enable us to live in peace, with justice, and in relationship with our God. God's Commandments seek our fidelity, to God and with each other. They are based on fairness, strengthening communities and families. They seek to establish a common, equitable system of conduct, recognizing the sacredness of life and valuing honesty, all-the-while rejecting inconsiderate, selfish, and self-serving behavior. Honor and respect is paramount: honoring God, honoring parents, honoring others. Additional directives tell us to reach out to the widow, the orphaned, and the sojourner. The prophet Micah put it so eloquently, "What does the Lord require? but to do justice, love kindness, and to walk humbly with our Lord?"

In 2006, let each of us be so resolved ... to live according to God's Laws and Commandments.

God was not content to rest with a relationship with humanity defined by Covenant and Law. Out of God's loving nature, we have been given Jesus Christ, as God's gift of Love to the

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world. Jesus called forth disciples and taught them how to live, with both his words and his actions. In love and compassion, Jesus reached out to the poor, the lost, the diseased, and wretched sinners – people like you and me. Jesus broke artificial boundaries of race and wealth, privilege and power, to bring a Gospel of repentance, forgiveness, and salvation to every human who lived under the sun. Jesus empowered his disciples to carry on his work after he ascended to heaven, by giving us the gift of his Spirit. That Holy Spirit sustains the work of Christ today, just as it did two thousand years ago: calling disciples and empowering us to live according to his example.

Love the Lord, and Love your neighbor. Love the enemy and the one who persecutes you. Love was Jesus' motive; and it should also be the motive of all we say, think, and do.

We've been given the example, the message, and the power of Jesus Christ. In 2006, let each of us be resolved to apply it to our faith, to our walk with Jesus, to our pilgrimage with God.

For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven. All things are according to God and His time, according to God's will and plan, according to God's purposes and love. We can loose ourselves in endless questions about why? where? or for what reason? But where does that get us?

Instead, in this new year let us take a new direction: One towards personal responsibility and integrity; one that resolves and confirms the issues of faith deeply within our souls; one that affirms and recommits ourselves to adhere to the essentials of the Christian life and faith. As disciples of Jesus Christ, let us be resolved to honor the Covenant we have with our God. Let us be resolved to live according to God's Commandments and directives. Let us be resolved in this new year to become as Christ like as possible – to love as he loved, to forgive as he forgave, to extend the promise just as he gives the gift of eternal life and salvation.

When we as individuals live according to these ideals, so too will our communities, so too will our society, so too will our world. And the result will be, once and for all time, God's kingdom will be established on earth just as it is in heaven.

This, my beloved, is my resolve. Will you join me?

The Word of the Lord, as it has come to me. Thanks be to God. Amen.

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