

Ecclesiastes 3:1-13 (NRSV)

Everything Has Its Time

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

² a time to be born, and a time to die;

a time to plant, and a time to pluck up what is planted;

³ a time to kill, and a time to heal;

a time to break down, and a time to build up;

⁴ a time to weep, and a time to laugh;

a time to mourn, and a time to dance;

⁵ a time to throw away stones, and a time to gather stones together;

a time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing;

⁶ a time to seek, and a time to lose;

a time to keep, and a time to throw away;

⁷ a time to tear, and a time to sew;

a time to keep silence, and a time to speak;

⁸ a time to love, and a time to hate;

a time for war, and a time for peace.

The God-Given Task

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



A Time for Every Matter

In the fall of 2010, while listening to NPR in my car, I heard an interview with Kristin Kimball. Kristen had just published a book entitled, ***The Dirty Life***, about her journey from being a NY City corporate executive to running a 600 acre cooperative farm, providing "members," volunteers, and employees with high quality homegrown produce in season. I was so excited about hearing about this early "food-to-table" CSA (Community Supported Agriculture), that I shared what I had heard with my son, Paul, upon arriving home. And even more exciting was that her farm, the Essex Farm, was located in the same county in which I lived.

A high school junior at the time, Paul was in an agricultural club, which that fall was busy planting garlic, and his club took a field trip to Essex Farm, where he met Kristin and her family. There he acquired a signed copy of the ***The Dirty Life*** for my Christmas gift. Now, there were more than a few people who were aghast at the title of this new treasure

for their pastor...*The Dirty Life*, until they learned that it was Kristen's memoir about an urban woman's journey to gardening and farming!!

One of the main learning points for author Kristin Kimball, was about her transition from a high powered corporate executive, where she was tied to technology, and working nearly every waking minute of every day. By contrast, on the farm, her life became rhythmically centered on what we might call "seasonality." All things happened in their due season. There was a season for lambing and hatching, and then for preparing the earth for planting. After the planting the focus surrounded nurturing each kind of plant and animal for maximum production. There was the harvesting of natural fertilizers and the application of natural pesticides. And soon would come time for harvesting, preserving, selling produce, and seeking memberships which would financially sustain their cooperative venture.

When harvesting season began, members would receive boxes full of the delicious produce. Early in the season that would include lettuce, spinach, peas, green onions, and perhaps just a few early cucumbers and string beans. As the weeks went on there would be added more string beans, summer squash, larger onions, garlic, and the first few cherry tomatoes. Eventually more tomatoes would be included until fall came bringing the harvest of beets, winter squashes, potatoes, and the like. When the harvesting is complete, the gardens and fields are cleaned, fertilized for their winter's rest, and the season of securing memberships and planning for the upcoming year begins.

Seasonality....seasonality is defined as the state of being dependent on the seasons; a pattern, variation, or fluctuation that is correlated with the seasons. It's strange, isn't it, how our globalized economy has eliminated so much seasonality from our supermarkets? We can walk into the produce section of Tops or Wegmans and find lettuce in January, tomatoes in March, and blueberries in November. And while I love purchasing strawberries for my shortcake in December, I have to wonder how much gasoline it takes to haul those berries from warmer climates to my grocery store, and what an impact that has on the environment. AND I wonder, when did seasonality get replaced by the sense of entitlement that justifies the expectation that we should have anything we want whenever we want it? Sadly, that entitlement stretches far beyond the availability of produce. When did the lines between busy and rest become so blurred? Why do more people practice all work and no play? What is the cost of this shift?

The wisdom of the biblical teaching reminds us that

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

Many of us became most familiar with this passage following the popularization of the 1960's hit song "Turn! Turn! Turn!" as written by Pete Seeger and recorded by The Byrds.

*To Everything (Turn, Turn, Turn)
There is a season (Turn, Turn, Turn)
And a time to every purpose, under Heaven*

The song then goes on to quote a portion of today's scripture passage!

If we eliminate a sense of seasonality from our lives, might we also be cutting out something foundational, a healthy rhythm, from our experience of life?

A Time for Every Matter

April 7, 2019 ~ Lent 5C

Rev. Rebekah Sweet

According to Ecclesiastes, seasonality is not simply limited to the literal seasons of the year. There is a “time for *every* matter under heaven.” If I were in charge of the world, healing would always be in season and killing never would be. It would always be a time to build up and we would never need to tear down anything. The time would always be right for laughing and dancing. I wonder how our experience of life would change if we set down our fantasies of finding some sort of permanent state of bliss and embraced life’s actual rhythm and flow? What would the rhythm of life be like if we gave up our sense of entitlement and could regain the ability of living a rich life even in the midst of someone’s definition of material poverty? What would our international relationships be like if they were based on a spirit of cooperation, rather than threat of annihilation?

It is plainly evident that the season for change is upon us. In the midst of creation, the days are getting longer and warmer, and the frost has come out of the ground beneath us. In our world, ideological, political, and theological polarization has caused communities to become sharply divided. In our own lives, maturation and aging bring us to new places and understandings of human relationships, the value of persons different from ourselves, and the devastating consequences of violent interaction.

There has never been a time when loving one another was so critical for our survival. Therefore, there has been no better time to invest heart, mind, soul, and strength into actually taking up Jesus’s blueprint and rebuilding our society according to this vision.

Since the dawning of human civilization, working to fulfill this vision has been like planting tomatoes in Kenmore in January. But now the sun is shining. Now the season has come.

We are coming to the end of our season, and worship series, which encourages us to fully avail ourselves of a time of reconnecting with God and renewing our spirits in the embrace of our Creator, Redeemer, and Sustainer. A new season is about to begin!

Would you please unite your hearts with mine as I offer this week’s prayer:

For times when we lose touch with the creation of which we are a part,
forgive us, O God. . . .

For times when we don’t let things unfold in their own time...forgive us.

Help us slow down when it is the season of our lives for doing so.

Help us celebrate and embrace the ebbs and flow of life.

Give us the ability to sense the balance so that we might
take pleasure in our toil *and* enjoy the fruits of our labor.

In this moment we hear your promise:

“I have set in motion all you need for happiness.

It’s OK to slow down and reconnect with the world around you.”

You do not ask us to go back to some yesteryear,
but to take time to smell the roses, savor the twilight, bask in the sun.

We are your children, created to flourish long with all of creation.

Amen.