

# January 1, 2017: New Year's Sermon



Plutarch, the ancient Greek historian and author wrote, "Time is the wisest of all counselors." Our contemporary saying puts it like this – "hindsight is 20/20." We recognize that even though we might not understand life as it unfolds before our eyes, someday, when time has passed we will look back and learn from our own histories. We might never understand why things happened as they did, but we will see how our lives changed and transformed from how our past played out. Time is a teacher... But time has another dimension to it as well. Since achievement and forward motion are so highly valued in our culture, time in its constant forward movement has become a commodity.

We have done our darndest though to make it seem to be itself a thing, rather than something that slips through our fingers as we try to hold onto it. We put it on watches and calendars and schedules. We make wise remarks about losing it and wasting it and spending it and killing it. We use the same verbs to talk about time as we do to talk about money. We save time and count time and invest time.

In our insistence of quantifying time, we often forget, to savor time, to enjoy time, to trust time. Instead we fill it and wrench it. We race against it and fight it. We make it an enemy instead of a friend. And so we lose it.

As hard as we try, we cannot make time stand still or speed up. We have to come to terms with time passing, and do our best to make the most of it – to learn from it, so that we don't repeat the same mistakes from our past. On this first day of the new year, we have the perfect opportunity to reflect on time – to learn from our own pasts, and to look to the future with hope for a fresh tomorrow, a fresh year ready to unfold before us.

Our reading from The Book of Ecclesiastes, helps us to recognize that life is not even, life is not smooth. "For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven." There is a time for good and bad things – whether we want them or not. All of these things that are mentioned, birth and death, loving and laughing, gaining and losing, will happen in every life. These things ARE life. We will not be able to avoid them however much we would like to do just that. The purpose of life lies in learning to enjoy each giddy part, to endure each costly part, to cope with every exhausting part, to learn from every colorless part, to stretch and groan and grow, to milk every single period of life dry. We can't cage life. We cannot freeze the present happy day under glass. We can't impale it like a butterfly in a frame. Life inevitably moves on, whether we go with it or not. It rocks and lurches and limps along from one lesson to another.

In this lesson we remember that there is no such thing as a meaningless moment. Each and every moment is a part of life, and there is indeed a season for each one. Indeed, Ecclesiastes weighs them all.

- It teaches that there is a time to kill whatever it is within us that keeps our souls from flying free.

- There is a time, to refrain from embracing whatever it is that is smothering the heart.
- There is a time to weep the tears of mourning those things and people in life who have brought us to where we are today.
- There is a time to embrace the good of life with great thumping hugs that give energy for the rest of the journey.
- There is a time to reap, to work hard, to achieve and assure the fruits of life.
- There is a time to love, to find ourselves in someone else, so that we can find ourselves at all.
- There is a time to lose, a time to let go of whatever has become our captor in life.
- There is a time to be born, fresh and full again out of old ideas, old forms, old shapes.
- There is a time to laugh, to let go of the propriety and laugh until your face is red and your sides hurt.
- There is a time to die, to put an end to things, to stop the carousel, to surrender to the forces of time and trust them.
- There is a time of war, of struggling against the forces within that make for our destruction.
- There is a time to heal ourselves from the hurts that weigh us down and keep us from taking charge of our own emotional lives.
- There is a time to build up, to work towards God's kingdom building, to co-create this world, so that what we leave behind is better than what we have received.
- Finally, there is a time for peace, for coming to grips with the demons within us, for staring them down and smoothing them out, so that we can live into God's Kingdom here on earth.

Which leaves us with today's question... the question of the new year... What is it time for in your life? What is it time for in our communal life as a church? What is God calling you to do, or to be in this time and place? What do you feel is our next step in this dance? Is it time to tear down and to weep? Or is it a time to build up and plant? What will we be seeking in this new year?

I hold in my mind the words from Micah chapter 3 – What does the Lord require of you, but to seek justice, love kindness, and walk humbly with your God? In the early '60s, at the height of the civil rights movement, a group of white ministers issued a public statement urging Dr. Martin Luther King, in the name of the Christian faith, to be more patient in his quest for justice and to relax the relentless struggle for civil rights.

King's response came in the form of the famous "Letter from Birmingham Jail." In the letter, King indicated that he had received similar requests for delay, indeed, that he had just gotten a letter from a "white brother in Texas" who wrote, "... It is possible you are in too great a religious hurry ... The teachings of Christ take time to come to earth."

Dr. King replied that such an attitude stemmed from a sad misunderstanding of time, the notion that time itself cures all ills. Time, King argued, could be used for good or for evil. Human progress, he said, is not inevitable, but rather "... it comes through the tireless efforts of men willing to be co-workers with God, and without this hard work,

time itself becomes an ally of the forces of social stagnation. We must use time creatively, in the knowledge that the time is always ripe to do right.”

As we move into this new year, as we decide what it is time for in our lives, I pray that we never forget that we are coworkers with God... that the time is always ripe to do right... to love, to forgive, to move towards healing and wholeness. I pray that we all move into a blessed and joyous new year!