

A Time for Everything Under Heaven

The Reverend Renée Marie Rico
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Ecclesiastes 3: 1-2

Introduction

What activities are you missing from your life right now? I'm talking about the kinds of activities that fuel you for life – the ones that you perhaps took for granted before the time of coronavirus, but now are missing in action.

For most of us, it's human interactions that are missed – connecting with friends over meals, or gathering for hikes with friends, or going to a theater for a live performance, or coming to worship Sunday in church and praying and singing together in one room.

But it's also routines through the year. Sports have their seasons, and we'd be in the thick of the baseball season at the moment (Go Dodgers!) – but as of recording this, it's not certain if the already abbreviated season will continue. Others among us have missed out on having family reunions, work lives, attending concerts and traveling to other countries.

Psychologists tell us to pay attention to this. The new seasons that the coronavirus has brought us are challenging, and worth addressing. We'll get back to this.

Wisdom of Another Kind

This past few weeks we have looked at seeking God's wisdom in the Bible, and today we begin a series from a book of the Bible that literally says that the author

“applied my mind to seek and search out by wisdom all that is done under heaven; it is an unhappy business that God has given to human beings to be busy with.”

One source that I consulted for this series calls this book “skeptical” or “dissenting” wisdom, so while we are continuing our theme of seeking wisdom, it will be from a different point of view.

The beginning of the book tells us that there is a teacher giving us this exposition, and through a kingly lens. Traditionally, this book was attributed to King Solomon, but modern scholars now think that this was a literary device used by the writer, and not the actual words of Solomon. It was probably written later, after the exiles had returned from Babylon and Jerusalem was restored as a city and the temple rebuilt.

One link that I see between this chapter 3 text is to that found in the Genesis 1 text – which is a beautifully written, poetic, and orderly description of God creation the cosmos. Our chapter 3 text has a similar construction of contrasts and depiction of everything under heaven being within God’s providence. Genesis one depicts the separation of light and dark as day and night, waters of heaven from waters of ground; Ecclesiastes will affirm the separations of time, and by naming, affirm the contrasts found in the couplets.

But let’s first start with the very beginning of the chapter. The opening line of chapter 3 is a grounded profound one:

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

Like Psalm 103 that we examined last week, the majesty of God is included here. Seasons will come and go, all under the care and providence of God.

What season is it?

I’ve been asking people what season we think we are in – and it’s difficult to name. The ads on TV and social media seem to think using the word “uncertain” will capture our time. And yes, I think we know that we are in an uncertain time, but I guess I’m looking for more descriptive names.

The season of coronavirus
 the season of protesting for equal justice
 the season of sanitizing and masks
 the season of reading
 the season of social distancing and isolation
 the season of computer screens
 the season of no (or few) sports
 the season of connecting with old friends
 the season of hand waves
 the season of making: making dinner, planting gardens, making masks, sewing clothes, or quilts

What would you name this season? I’d love to hear your take.

Beginnings and Ends

A time to be born and a time to die;
a time to plant, and a time to pluck up what is planted.

As I began to ponder these, I realized that they are the beginning and ends, with a whole lot of middle left out. And that bothered me, because of course after birth there is a whole lot of feeding the baby with breast or bottle, or changing diapers, or giving baths, etc., and the same for planting crops or flowers – so much of the productive parts happen in the very long middle.

That's when I realized – this is shorthand, not the whole enchilada. Our writer has, in his first opening, already told us that yes, *everything* has a season. Our author is saying, yes, from the *very* beginning to the *very* end, there a season for it, a time for it to play out.

So it gives me hope to think about our time now, remembering that everything has a season, even this disorienting time.

A Season For

I'm not going to try to convince anyone that this particular season has to be extra-special significant to folks. If you decide to write a novel during this time – hey, that's terrific! But for most of us, the increased stress and anxiety mean that we actually need to be nicer to ourselves than we usually are – more forgiving, more grace-filled.

Blogger Mark Schaefer offers these questions for us to consider talking with our partners or reflecting ourselves during this season.

- How are you holding up today?
- What can I/we do to make things better, more fun, more interesting today?
- What can I/we do to find new meaning and purpose to replace our routines?
- Am/are I/we successfully accommodating our at-home routines?

Another thing to consider is setting a new goal that works within our current season – some are planting gardens, others are taking up new hobbies, or planning something to do after we are more able to live more normally – perhaps a trip, or a get-together. I find that having something to look forward to helps a lot with our day-to-day schedules.

Journeying the Seasons in Faith

As we walk this journey in this season, I'd like to share this sonnet by poet and priest Malcolm Guite

Sounding the Seasons by Malcolm Guite

Tangled in time, we go by hints and guesses,
Turning the wheel of each returning year.
But in the midst of failures and successes
We sometimes glimpse the love that casts out fear.
Sometimes the heart remembers its own reasons
And beats a Sanctus as we sing our story,
Tracing the threads of grace, sounding the seasons
that lead at last through time to timeless glory.
From the first yearning for a Savior's birth
To the full joy of knowing sins forgiven,
We start our journey here on God's good earth
To catch an echo of the choirs of heaven.
I send these out, returning what was lent,
Turning to praise each 'moment's monument.'