

Rambling Thoughts about Time

Ecclesiastes 3

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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.

Some updating for the TIME of Covid.

There is a time to reorganize every room in the house (April), and a time to let the house go because the kids are now in charge (June).

There is a time for the kids to stay home (March 15- August 17) and a time for them to go to school, now.

There is a time to eat out (2019) and a time eat at home (2020).

There is a time to pick up Purell because it is in stores, and now is the time;

There is a time to pray and a time to socially isolate and pray.

In all seriousness, we are in a time we never could have imagined a year ago.

This passage is perfect for 2020, about COVID, about race issues, about reforming policing, about living without sports. I can't believe it has taken me this long to see how this is the perfect passage for these days.

“There is a time for” is not a confession that God makes it so. God does not dictate what we do. Life happens, there will be a time for silence and a time to

Speak up. The burden is knowing what time it is. It's our choice. We choose how to use the time.

My parents were adults during World War II. My mother lived with my aunt Helen, my dad was off at war. Each month mom and Helen received ration coupons. There was a limit to how much sugar, meat, and coffee you could purchase. The GOVERNMENT imposed these limits. I cannot report the overall reaction to this action. With the benefit of history and looking back, I have not heard any significant segment of the population lamenting or protesting these restrictions.

I'm not going to say there were none. I will say it appears we all stood together. Furthermore, I will say that I cannot imagine my mother or any woman of that day standing at the cash register, demanding more coffee than was permitted. But I witnessed this year a woman at Publix trying to buy 4 12 packs of toilet paper, when the sign clearly said, "2 per customer." Then arguing when the minimum wage employee would not allow her this privilege. I see videos weekly of men and women refusing to wear a mask in Costco and then arguing with salespeople and managers, asserting that they have rights and cannot be forced to wear a mask.

I guess the people in 1942 didn't know they had rights. Or maybe they just knew that was the TIME to work together not to demand their rights.

To paraphrase scripture, “There’s a time to defend our rights, there’s also a time to wear a mask and stay 6 feet away.”

You may also remember another passage about time from scripture. In the book of Esther, Mordecai, who was the legal guardian and cousin of Esther, told her **14** “For if you keep silence at such a time as this, relief and deliverance will rise for the Jews from another quarter, but you and your father’s family will perish. Who knows? Perhaps you have come to royal dignity for just such a time as this.”

A decree had been made by the King for the destruction of the Jews. Esther, a Jewish woman, was the queen, and Mordecai was pleading with her to intervene and speak up to the king on behalf of the Jews.

Esther was wrestling with what time it was. Was it time to keep silent or time to speak up? At first, she sided with silence, believing it too dangerous to speak up.

I find it odd that these days most people think it is time to speak. Many people who have hatred and division as their goal think anytime is the right TIME to speak up. No matter the subject, Alex Jones think the best interest is served by speaking. Children die at Sandy Hook, let’s not mourn, not let’s speak up.

On the other hand, many people who have justice and love as their goal also think anytime is the right TIME to speak up.

Esther did not believe it was best to be silent. She believed it was safer.

We know what the scripture says---speak or silence but listen closely.

Think about all of the issues in our TIME:

Injustice

Cultural tension over privilege

Police reform

Free speech

Peaceful protest

Violence

Black lives Matter

Government Responsibility

Truth and transparency

“What if” when the scripture says it’s TIME for silence, could it be silence is actually the time to listen! Esther needed to speak up but was silent because she was afraid. But what if silence TODAY is not passive but active? What if listening is what silence looks like? Not speaking up and not remaining silent but using our ears. Could that be the writer’s point? There is a time to use our mouth (speak) and a time to use our ears (silence).

How might we live in God’s vision for our time if we listened instead of spoke?

How would things change if we listened to police about the responsibility they carry. Someone falls asleep in the drive-thru, they get called, a husband and a wife are too loud they get called, homeless people get too close to main street they are called. Call 911; if you have a fire, it goes to the fire department, medical emergency transferred to EMS, anything else ends up with the police. They leave their families each day, and while most are not out to hurt them, the police don't respond to calls at churches and nursing homes. When they go out, they go to highly emotional places and deal with people who are often having the worst day of their life. Their voice must be heard, and for it to be heard, we must listen.

How would things change if we listened to African-Americans express how they feel. Arrived on the shores in 1619, enslaved until 1865. Jim Crowed until 1965. So, for 346 years of the 400 years, they have been on this land they have enslaved, lynched, threatened, segregated, and marginalized. In case you are wondering, that's 87% of their time on this continent. After the voting rights act of 1965, the battlefield changed from the ballot box to the courtroom.

The [1986 Anti-Drug Abuse Act](#) and the [1988 Anti-Drug Abuse Act](#) enacted an astounding [100-to-1 disparity in crack vs. powder cocaine. Crack is the drug used by African Americans, and powder cocaine the drug of choice for white people. A crack sentenced](#) carried a mandatory minimum sentence for first-

time non-violent possession of crack cocaine. This made crack cocaine the only drug with a mandatory minimum penalty for a first-time non-violent possession offense. This targeted African-American men. This legislation meant that someone convicted of possessing *five grams of crack cocaine* would receive a mandatory minimum prison sentence of 5 years, while someone would have to be convicted of possession of *500 grams of powder cocaine* to get the same prison sentence. The crack cocaine was what African-Americans used in the city, powder cocaine is what whites used in the suburbs. This legislation punished the poor far more than it punished the wealthy. So maybe we should listen and not speak when African-Americans are describing their pain.

How would things change if we listened to our Jewish neighbors? We are not a minority but think about being 2% of a population. When we listen to Jews about everyday situations, we may learn what it means to be bullied and vulnerable to an overwhelming majority.

What would happen if we listened to teachers who are underpaid, and from the words of some under-appreciated? Instead of being treated as professionals entrusted with our most precious gift (children), they have to listen to politicians describe them as babysitters.

So when we are silent, let us use the silence to listen so that when we do speak, we speak up with more understanding and less judgment, more empathy, less fear, more solidarity, less division.

I am not implying that silence or even listening is the only response. There is a time to speak up, and I suspect after we have listened and learned, speaking up is a brave and necessary action to take. But truthfully, don't you feel like a lot of people are speaking and haven't taken the time to listen?

With social media speaking up is easier to do than ever, but in our rush to speak, we need to make time to listen first.

But before we leave, let's also consider is it TIME to keep or time to throw away.

My family did not raise hoarders. We come from a long line of "discarders." I think my own children could work for the CIA. They could throw everything they need in a duffle bag and clear out of a residence in less than a minute.

So, it is always time to throw away, but is there a time to keep? Most people fall on this side of the mountain. People enjoy collecting. "That's mamas, don't throw it away." "That was given to us for our wedding. I can't believe after 44 years, you are ready to throw it out."

The writer's point this morning is that everything has its day. Our job is to know when to keep the first glove our son used and when to throw it in the trash.

But let's not limit this to things. There are some ideas whose time has come and gone, and yet we cling to them like a life jacket in three feet of water. Hardly anything lives forever, not even ideas.

One of the most enlightening moments in my life was when I was given a new language to let go of ideas that no longer worked, but I was afraid to say they were wrong. We often tag ideas and beliefs with words like good and bad.

When we do this, we are reluctant to move away from what we or others we value, have labeled good. It may have once been good, but now you or others have outgrown the idea like a coat. It would be the height of foolishness to wear at 30 the coat we were given at 12. Being that we have locked ourselves into words that convey value---bad and good, it's hard to part with something we have always thought of as good even when the idea is no longer working.

The new language I was given to provide the freedom to "throw away" was "dead and alive." Ideas have expiration dates. Ideas can die, I found this language in scripture.

Jesus was this relentless reformer. You can't look at people who think they can worship on this mountain or that they must come to this place to sacrifice and say "You people are wrong." That's not going to move the meter.

Jesus learned to teach people that their ideas---which were once accurate, were now dead. Once, God was at the Temple, but now God is not. To cling to the dead idea could be disastrous, but at the very least as an adult, holding on to

dead ideas is like wearing a life jacket in three feet of water. It just makes us look silly.

A final thought on what time is it now.

We call ourselves Christians. Actually, in the first century, this was the name given to us by our critics. We were these people that, in some ways, we reflected exactly who Jesus was, and in turn, was the living embodiment of God. So we were the hands and feet of God.

Of course, we are not the hands and feet of God from birth or every day. Like we grow into our bodies, we grow into the likeness of Christ. I suspect Paul was trying to explain this mystery when he wrote:

“Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship. **2** Do not conform to the pattern of this world but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.”

Paul’s description was transformation. This is what our time on earth is for, to be changed. Paul admits this world would love for us to accept the default position on how to treat others, how to follow God, but Paul warns us not to. Instead, we are to be this constantly growing-transforming sacrifice.

Yet we hear something about God at 12 and never update it. Something is poured into our mind about Jews and we never confront those ideas with the calling from our Jewish Savior to “love our neighbor.”

A vaccine is not going to fix our joy problem, or our fear problem. Getting the COVID under control is not going to make social unrest disappear or create more justice or make us listen.

These things will not go away until we are transformed. There is a time to hold tight and hang on and there is a time to be TRANSFORMED. Embrace the new, listen to others, and move with the spirit. As followers of Christ we are not asked to be perfect or even to be orthodox, but we are asked to be changed. It's time to be change.