

Season of Love

October 16, 2010

Ecclesiastes 3:1 – 15

The Reading of God’s Word for the People of God

¹ There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under heaven:

² a time to be born and a time to die, a time to plant and a time to uproot,

³ a time to kill and a time to heal, a time to tear down and a time to build,

⁴ a time to weep and a time to laugh, a time to mourn and a time to dance,

⁵ a time to scatter stones and a time to gather them, a time to embrace and a time to refrain,

⁶ a time to search and a time to give up, a time to keep and a time to throw away,

⁷ a time to tear and a time to mend, a time to be silent and a time to speak,

⁸ a time to love and a time to hate, a time for war and a time for peace.

⁹ What does the worker gain from their toil? ¹⁰ I have seen the burden God has laid on humankind. ¹¹ God has made everything beautiful in its time. God has also set eternity in the hearts of humankind; yet they cannot fathom what God has done from beginning to end. ¹² I know that there is nothing better for creation than to be happy and to do good while they live. ¹³ That everyone may eat and drink, and find satisfaction in all their toil—this is the gift of God. ¹⁴ I know that everything God does will endure forever; nothing can be added to it and nothing taken from it. God does it so that humankind will revere the Creator.

This is the Word of God and It can be trusted. Thanks be to God.

Let us pray:

God of our weary years, God of our silent tears, O Good and gracious God, you are the God of health and wholeness. In the plan of your creation, you call us to struggle in our sickness and to cling always to the cross of your Son, our Savior, Jesus Christ. Creator of all that was and is and is to come, we are your servants. Many among us are now suffering with HIV or AIDS. We come before you, and ask you, if it is your Holy will, to take away this suffering from us, restore us to health and lead us to know you and your powerful healing, love of body and spirit. We ask you also to be with those of us who nurse your sick ones. We are the mothers, fathers, sisters, brothers, children, and friends of your suffering people. It is so hard for us to see those whom we love suffer. You know what it is to suffer. Help us to minister in loving care, support, and patience to your people who suffer with HIV and AIDS. Lead us to do whatever it will take to eradicate this illness from the lives of those who are touched by it, both directly and indirectly. Trusting in you and the strength of your Spirit, we pray these things in the name of Jesus. Amen.

Have you ever had one of those days when things just happened so quickly or moved so fast that it seemed that the day was over before it had hardly begun? It seems the more I have to accomplish in a given day, the less time there seems to work with. More than likely, however, it is the opposite reaction that most of us get out of a day. It doesn't matter how much we do or how distracted we become by the activities of the day, time just seems to linger on and what surely for us has been hours, only adds up to be mere minutes on the clock. The day just never seems to end. Whether we have perceived the day to be one that has gone by quickly (too quickly for some of us) or one that has lingered on forever, the hard reality is that today, like yesterday and the day before is, with a mild margin of error, exactly as long as the day is going to be tomorrow; 23 hours – 56 minutes – 4.1 seconds. But for all intents and purposes, let's just say, 24 hours.

So is 24 hours a lot or a little? I would imagine it, like most items in life, depends on the amount of worth we place on it. 24 hours could be 24 episodes of Grey's Anatomy, Law and Order or any other of your favorite TV Dramas. 24 hours could be 20% of the time that passes from the end of your weekend to the beginning of the next one. If given the value of a dollar calculated at minimum wage, \$7.25 per hour, then a day is worth about \$174. Not a lot of money for some and then again, maybe a well needed blessing for others. The gestation period for humans, that is, the time it takes a pregnant woman to carry her child to full term is approximately 266 days. Twenty-four hours, then, seems like a drop in a bucket when compared to the total number of days needed to nurture life in the earliest stages of development. For the individual who is awaiting the results of a blood test, or word on a diagnosis for themselves or a loved one, 24 hours can seem like a life time and for the couple in love whose very existence is no longer defined by their individuality but by the life, love and joy they bring to one another – a day can seem like mere seconds, especially as one of them finds that the end of their journey is drawing to an end more rapidly than the journey of their partner, their spouse, their loved one, their friend.

So how does all of this relate to our reading earlier? Albert Einstein once wrote, "The only reason for time is so that everything doesn't happen at once." I'm not sure if it's the *only* reason, but it does seem to be a pretty good one. So many of us get so wrapped up in the now, that we fail to see that time passes in such a way that order is birthed daily from what we may otherwise perceive as chaos. With the dawning of each new day comes a reminder of the Creation plan of God; an utterance of the now quiet echo of the once boisterous voice of God speaking light from darkness, defining for us what we have come to know as, *a day*. And God said, "Let there be light," and there was light. God saw that the light was good, and He separated the light from the darkness. God called the light "day," and the darkness he called "night." And there was evening, and there was morning—the first day. . . . And God said, "Let there be lights in the expanse of the sky to separate the day from the night, and let them serve as signs to mark seasons and days and years . . ." (Genesis 1:1 – 5, 14)

Since the very beginning, God has had a plan and God calls each of us to be a part of the Creation experience. With the development of seasons, we become aware that *everything*, as Albert Einstein so eloquently stated, *cannot happen as once*. Even God, the author of all Creation, did not create *everything all at once*, but knew that there must be a natural order to existence; a time to every purpose under heaven. The musical, *Rent*, has spoken to the minds, hearts and souls of many, echoing De La Torre's call for us to take notice of those who have been disenfranchised and marginalized by society. It doesn't matter if you identify as straight, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgendered, queer, questioning or intersexed, the overall theme of the *Rent* opening number, *Seasons of Love* – which we sang together earlier this evening – challenges each of us to answer the question, "How do we measure a year?" So we must answer this question for ourselves, tonight? Do we measure a year in terms of the ordinary; in daylights and sunsets or in cups of coffee and by the trials of our life or do we look at a year as more than just a calendar of events?

To measure a year, as the song suggest, in terms of the calendar or by our daily routines and expectations, limits our perception of the bigger picture. The author of Ecclesiastes, reminds us that there is a natural order of our existence and creation, but we must not forget that our God and our Creator, the author of all that was, and is and is to come, as defined in 1 John 4, is indeed the standard by which all should be measured and that unit of measurement is love. John writes, “Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love.” (4:7 – 8) As we paraded down the streets of Atlanta last weekend, sharing the love of God to the LGBTQ Population and all those who gathered to support our community, we were bombarded periodically by those who claimed to be God’s people with rants of hate and discontent. “You’re an abomination! You’re going to hell!” All this judgment and confusion spewed out of the mouths of the same individuals who claimed to know and love God. But where was the love? Where was God in all of this? The presence of God marched with us and God’s love shone brightly within the light of each individual who showered the discontent of those who we have yclept to be haters with chants of, “One God, One Love! One God, One Love.” Though the chant began with New Day, it reached the crowd with acceptance and soon the crowd, made up of various faiths, various orientations and understandings of our Creator, joined in and if for just a moment, we were united by the resounding words of 1 John 4:8, “God is love.”

Yes, there is a season and a purpose for everything under heaven. The words of Ecclesiastes 3 teaches us this clearly, void of confusion and perplexity. We are reminded that there are some events over which we have no control and how we deal with this reality speaks volumes to our understanding and our relationship with God. “There is a time,” the author of Ecclesiastes writes, “for everything and a season for every activity under heaven: a time to be born and a time to die; a time to plant and a time to uproot; a time to kill and a time to heal; a time to tear down and a time to build . . .” It is not right that we should try to plant our harvest in the fall and expect to reap in the winter. It is not right that we

should turn a blind eye to a nation of people who have been set aside and forgotten when there is a call on God's people to remember the disenfranchised of not only those far away, but of those next door; our neighbors whom we have been commanded to love as ourselves. It is not right that we should allow those living with and affected by HIV/AIDS to continue to question their own self worth and mortality in the shadows of denied health care and the stigma fostered by an ignorant, unaware society.

In his book, *Reading the Bible from the Margins*, De le Torre has the following to say about our awareness of Christ's presence in all that we encounter and in being attentive to the value of each and every individual we encounter.

If the image of a white Christ symbolizes the religious sanction of oppressive societal structures, how should people on the margins perceive Jesus? Inevitably, every semester one of my students will ask me how I would physically describe Jesus. They really want me to comment on the color of his skin. Is it white? Black? Olive tone? I always respond in the same fashion: when I attempt to picture the incarnation, I envision Jesus as an old black Latina woman with AIDS. Why? The most disdained by society is the form the Deity takes. Because of racism, sexism, ageism, and society's fear of AIDS, such a person is normatively avoided, ignored, and shunned. Yet in Matthew Jesus says that he is just that person: "Truly I say to you, inasmuch as you did it to one of these, the least of my people, you did it to me" (25:40). Jesus can be found among those whom society marginalizes. That homeless person you passed by this morning, avoiding eye contact – he is Jesus. The woman from the margins you refused to hire, the man of color cited by the police for driving under the influence of being nonwhite, the family from the margins who is charged higher interest and insurance rates – these are all Jesus. The person with AIDS whom we condemn, equating his or her infirmity with God's punishment, this person is also Jesus. All those people who make us uncomfortable because they do not belong to our race, ethnic group, or economic class embody Jesus. Jesus is reincarnated in the lives of those who are crucified today, a sacrifice made so that those in power can continue to enjoy their privilege. (P. 107)

Our Call to Worship tonight was replaced with what I like to call a “Call to Awareness.” Why? Because we, as people of God who have ourselves experienced the harsh realities of prejudice and hatred through the misuse of God’s word, have a responsibility to ensure that we do not inadvertently do the same harm to one of our own. As a community of faith, together we have said that we would sponsor AIDS Athens and AIDS Atlanta through our monetary gifts and our time, but have we done so because we truly care about these efforts or because they are efforts that we can assist without getting too close. Are we in a season of obligation or a Season of Love? Is it time to reap or to plant? I believe that, unlike the need to wait for the appropriate season to prepare for harvest or to keep and throw away, there is always, in every season, the appropriateness to love.

So tonight, as we light our candles in memory and honor of those living with and affected by HIV/AIDS and as we meet together at this table to carry out Christ’s Command to remember him by once again celebrating the Holy Meal, I encourage you to take a moment to consider why it is you are here and to seek God in this moment; not out of obligation, but out of love. Let us not put limits on the Holy Spirit, but rather seek to be placated by the Holy Spirit, our comforter and our guide.

This altar is open as a place for you to pray, to seek and to explore your relationship with God, but know that God will meet you where you are. There are many here tonight who would be happy to pray with you, if you like, or you may pray alone, but please, please pray. Pray for those around you and ask those around you to pray for you. The most important thing tonight is that you come to terms with the love of God in your life and that you reconcile your relationship with your Creator and your God. Please stand, as you are comfortable, as we prepare to sing.

Acknowledging tonight the presence of the creation bearing power of the light brought forth out of darkness and the breath of life within each of us, let us offer up praise and glory tonight to our Creator and our God. Amen!