

January 17, 2010

Scripture: Ecclesiastes 3: 1-8, 11-15

Sermon: "Everything Suitable for its Time"

As I read these words from Ecclesiastes, and as we hear these words from Ecclesiastes, we realize that there is a rhythm. "A time to be born, a time to die, A time to sow, a time to reap, a time to laugh, a time to cry". There is a rhythm to this passage. It is a rhythm that moves us back and forth, back and forth, left to right almost like the y are pendulum of a clock, clicking off the minutes, marking the seconds. Back and forth, the pendulum swings. Back and forth, the pendulum moves. Back and forth, time moves on.

When we hear these words from Ecclesiastes, we experience a rhythm, the rhythm of time, the rhythm of movement, the rhythm of life. A rhythm that defines, enriches, and gives meaning to our lives here on earth. A rhythm that gives us strength for the journey ahead. A rhythm that assures us that this too will pass.

When we hear these words from Ecclesiastes, we find great comfort and hope for our journey as people of faith as we travel through life with all its ups and downs, good and bad times, and all its unexpected turns.

When we hear these words from Ecclesiastes, we remember that we worship a God who larger than time and space but still took the time to form each of us as God's very own.

When we hear these words from Ecclesiastes, we find peace. We find understanding. We find solace in all of life's varied events.

To be honest, I had another Scripture and title all picked out for this Sunday but after just a few short weeks into the new year, after hearing our stories, after experiencing the ups and downs of life, I thought we as a community of faith needed to hear once again that God is in control, that we needed to hear that God is holding us in the palm of God's hand, that rhythm of time is not defined by you or me but was set in motion by the hand of God.

And these words from Ecclesiastes came to my mind, almost as if a voice was saying-Let this rhythm of life bring healing. Let this rhythm of life bring comfort. Let this rhythm of life bring hope. Let this rhythm of life bring purpose and grace.

That was at the beginning of the week and as the week moved on and images continued to f lash of our brothers and sisters in Haiti suffering; I began to wonder if this was the right message to bring this morning. And again, it was almost as if a voice was saying, "Share these words from Ecclesiastes. Let the rhythm bring of life bring healing. Let the rhythm of life bring comfort. Let the rhythm of life bring hope."

Share this words from Ecclesiastes and remind us all that as people of faith we march to a steady beat, a steady beat that is the basis for the rhythm of life, drummed out by our God who in the beginning, who is with us now, and who will be with us in the future.

Share these words that beat out A steady cadence: “a time to be born, a time to die: God is there”, “a time to sow, a time to reap: God is there” A time to weep, a time to laugh: God is there”

A steady cadence that beats out the rhythm of life and reminds us that in this full range of human experience, God is there.

Share these words that flow in a steady cadence that will bring us healing, brings us comfort, and brings hope.

When we hear these words from Ecclesiastes, we must understand that they are written by someone who has lived a long life, who has experienced life’s ups and downs, and now is wondering what is point. What is the purpose of it all? It’s almost as if this person is having a struggle of faith. Throughout Ecclesiastes, the author says “Vanities of vanities, all is vanity”. What’s the point to life? What’s the purpose? We work all day but get no farther than we already are. Good things happen to bad people and bad things happen to good people. Life is full of disappointment, frustrations, and broken dreams. What’s the point? One minute we are okay and then the next minute we are not. Earthquakes, fires, floods, death. What’s the point? What’s the purpose of life? Why go on? What’s the meaning behind it all?

In the words of Ecclesiastes, we hear a struggle of faith.

We imagine as we hear these words that the author sits down to share his wisdom and he reflects over his life. He has seen the world through the eyes of a child, full of laughter, free from worry, and embraced the world as a place for new adventure, new discoveries, amazed at each and every one. The author of Ecclesiastes has seen the world through the eyes of a young man, full of life, full of fire, ready to take on the world. He has seen the world through the eyes of a middle age man, not as quick as he used to be, and notices that the world takes on a different hue, not as bright as it used to be, not as clear as it used to be. And now he is seeing the world through eyes of an older man, one that has experienced life, has experienced joys, has experienced sorrows, has experienced new life, has experienced death and wants to know: “What does it all mean? What’s the purpose behind it all? What is life?

We hear a struggle of faith. And in the words that we hear today from Ecclesiastes, we also hear an invitation to see beyond our view and to see the bigger picture. It’s almost as if God is saying: “You are all down there. You can only see what’s going on around you. Join me up here on this platform and see the bigger picture, see how it all fits together, see the pendulum of time, moving back and forth, left and right, marking off the minutes, clicking off the seconds.

And once we climb up on the platform and we see the bigger picture, we begin to understand the Good News that is before us in these words from Ecclesiastes. We hear this voice saying to us: “People measure time in minutes and in seconds. People measure time in good times and in bad. People measure time in realized hopes and broken dreams. People measure time in past, present and future. Not God. There is no time and space for God. There is no good and bad for God. There is just is for God. Our God set the wheels of time in motion. Our God placed the stars in

the heaven. Our God built the mightiest mountain. Our God formed the tiniest grain of sand. And our God continues to hold us in the palm of God's hand.

In these words from Ecclesiastes we hear a voice saying to us "There is a bigger picture, a bigger picture that covers a full range of human experiences and through it all, there is God with the promise that this too shall pass.

When we hear these words from Ecclesiastes, we hear, experience and move to the rhythm of life. And It brings us healing. It brings us comfort. It brings us hope.

And as we move through life, dancing to its rhythm, embracing the good and the bad times, embracing our hurts and celebrations, we must remember that time is really measured in God's time and God has a plan and a purpose and a time for everything. There is no past, present, future in a linear focus. Life is cyclical and through all the cycles of life, God is there.

And it is when we accept this, then we realize that we are free, free to embrace the good news that "we live in and bear witness to the experience of life, the good, the bad, the ugly and the breath-takenly beautiful. We experience life [as people of faith, as people of God] and we find strength, courage, and hope in the fact that God is in control, that "we are in fact being found by a new season, a new time" that is not defined by minutes or seconds but by God, God's grace and God's goodness. And we find that "within this [new kind] of time, we are met by the wonder and joy and possibilities of the creative response" of God continuing to work in our world, be a part of our world, to hold those who are suffering in the palm of God's hand, to cry and mourn with those who have lost loved ones, to sing with joy as life is embraced.

God's time cannot be measured in minutes or seconds or days or years. God's time is measured in embraces, in tears, in joys, in sorrow, always working, always creating, always renewing, always making things anew. God's time is measure out like beats of a drum, tapping out the rhythm of life that brings healing, comfort, and hope.

The author of Ecclesiastes is reminding us that we have been given a great gift: the gift of life, a life that will be full of ups and downs, joys and sorrows, realized hopes and broken dreams. We have been given a life that is full of the creative possibilities of God. We have been given life that rest secure in the knowledge that God was with us in the beginning, is with us now, and will always be with us. As people of faith, we are called to experience Life, in all its varied forms: the good, the bad, the ugly and the breath-takenly beautiful. We experience life as children of God always held secure in the knowledge that our God is continuing to work, create, and make all things new.

Vanities of vanities, all is vanity. Until we experience the rhythm of life.

The thing we must hold onto as we continue our journey of faith, when it seems as if there is no point, there is no reason, when it seems like "everything is meaningless and senseless, when it seems like God is nowhere to be found, these words from Ecclesiastes invites us to hear once again the rhythm of life and to remember that everything has its place, the good, the bad, the ugly and the breath-takenly beautiful." They invite us to remember that in the full range of

human experiences, God is there, celebrating, crying, suffering, renewing, sowing, reaping, mending, healing, uplifting, sharing, enfolding, protecting, guiding, leading, and most importantly, God is there, continuing to create, continuing to make things new, continuing to work in our world, continuing to hold to God's promises, continuing to fill our lives with grace, hope, peace and love.

In these words from Ecclesiastes, we hear and remember that God is in control, that God has the last word, not this world, that God was with us in the beginning, is with us now, and will be with us in the future. We hear and gain strength because we have been set free, free to enjoy life, free to share God's grace, free to hope, free to know that our God is good, always working, always creating, always making things anew because God has set everything suitable in its own time.

When we hear these words from Ecclesiastes, we are renewed and enlivened for the journey ahead. When we hear these words, we let them wash over us, like water, making everything anew. When we hear these words, we find comfort. We find strength. We find healing. And most importantly, we find hope because we know that in the full range of human experiences, God is there, holding us in the palm of God's hand.

Vanities of vanities, all is vanity until we experience and move with the rhythm of life.

May we always remember the beat and trust that God is there, leading the dance we call life.

Amen.