

Busy: A Time for Everything - Ecclesiastes 3:1-13

Norwalk Christian Church, April 5, 2019, Lent 5 - Non-Lectionary, WDS Series - Busy

Thank you, Katie, for reading that scripture. Though, I would imagine it was hard not to sing those words. The ancients knew this as a poem, a work of Wisdom Literature, as it is called, written by an unknown writer that Tradition has called Solomon, but the book refers to simply as “The Preacher.”

But the Preacher has Pete Seeger to thank for really introducing us to these words. Admittedly, Pete Seeger only wrote 7 words of his song, originally called “To Everything There Is a Season.” (By the way, those words are “Turn,” repeated, and the ending, “I swear it’s not too late.”) The rest of the song is an almost verbatim copy of the King James Version of Ecclesiastes 3:1-8. But it was the Folk-Rock band The Byrds that made Seeger’s words...I mean that ancient preacher’s words...famous.

In order to ensure this song will be stuck in your head the rest of the day, Jenny Schaff and Kim Ward are going to share it with us.

Turn, Turn, Turn.

*To everything (turn, turn, turn)
There is a season (turn, turn, turn)
And a time to every purpose, under heaven*

*A time to be born, a time to die
A time to plant, a time to reap
A time to kill, a time to heal
A time to laugh, a time to weep*

*To everything (turn, turn, turn)
There is a season (turn, turn, turn)
And a time to every purpose, under heaven*

*A time to build up, a time to break down
A time to dance, a time to mourn
A time to cast away stones, a time to gather stones together*

*To everything (turn, turn, turn)
There is a season (turn, turn, turn)
And a time to every purpose, under heaven*

*A time of love, a time of hate
A time of war, a time of peace
A time you may embrace, a time to refrain from embracing.*

*To everything (turn, turn, turn)
 There is a season (turn, turn, turn)
 And a time to every purpose, under heaven*

*A time to gain, a time to lose
 A time to rend, a time to sew
 A time for love, a time for hate
 A time for peace, I swear it's not too late.*

Thank you, Kim and Jenny!

Pete Seeger stopped his song there. I guess the rest of the ancient song didn't fit the rhythm: ¹¹He has made everything suitable for its time; moreover he has put a sense of past and future into their minds, yet they cannot find out what God has done from the beginning to the end. ¹²I know that there is nothing better for them than to be happy and enjoy themselves as long as they live; ¹³ moreover, it is God's gift that all should eat and drink and take pleasure in all their toil.

It's striking, isn't it? It might be one of the most beautiful passages in all of scripture. It's definitely one of the wisest. We don't know who wrote this song originally, but whoever she was, she was a person who has journeyed through the ups and downs of life. She had calloused hands, scars, and incredible stories. I say *She*, because we men don't often have this kind of perspective. This is mother wisdom. Lady Wisdom, as she has been called. Wisdom is a woman.

That's what it says in Proverbs, that other Wisdom Book. Chapter 8. It's another song, a song about the beauty and virtue of wisdom. "Does not wisdom call," it begins, "and does not wisdom raise her voice?"

"On the heights, beside the way, at the crossroads she takes her stand; beside the gates in front of the town ... she cries out: Hear, for I will speak noble things, and from my lips will come what is right.

And who is this "Lady Wisdom"?

"The Lord created me at the beginning of his work, the first of his acts of long ago. Ages ago I was set up, at the first, before the beginning of the earth... When he established the heavens, I was there, when he drew a circle on the face of the deep... Then I was beside [the Lord], like a master worker; and I was daily his delight, rejoicing before him always, rejoicing in his inhabited world and delighting in the human race."

Did you hear that? Proverbs 8 says that Lady Wisdom was beside God at creation. God, literally, created everything *with* wisdom.

So, it's appropriate that this wise preacher in Ecclesiastes points us to creation. There is wisdom in creation. "To everything there is a season," she sings.

Look to creation, and you will see seasons. Rhythms. A woman's body has a rhythm. The oceans have a rhythm. The seasons have a rhythm. "*Winter, Spring, Summer, and Fall.*" And when those seasons are out of rhythm, when it's too cold in Spring, we want to raise our voice like Lady Wisdom at the city gates and say, "To everything there is a season!" And the season now is Spring!

There is a time for everything. Everything does not have to happen at once. Everything does not have to always be the same. And yet, we are often so busy, spending so much time trying to change the time and seasons, that we never learn to live in the season we are in.

Lady Wisdom puts it this way at the end of her song:
"It is God's gift that all should eat and drink and take pleasure in all their toil."

"Take pleasure in all their toil..." How do you take pleasure in toil? I think what she's saying is, God's gift can be found, enjoyed, experienced to it's full when we take pleasure in whatever season of life we are in, whatever toil we are doing.

Or if you don't like the word "pleasure", maybe we could substitute the word "advantage" or maybe just "Note." "It is God's gift that we should take note/take advantage of every season."

I didn't really understand Seasons until I moved to Iowa. The cold and frost, followed by the spring and all the colors. The warm summer and the green of everything, followed by the fall, when everything around us settles in for a long winter nap. And it seems, the harsher the Winter, the more incredible the Spring.

Nature knows how to live by the seasons. Do we?

Life, like all creation, moves in seasons. Ages of life. Seasons of grief. Good and bad. Old and young. Planting and reaping. Laughing and weeping. Whatever season you are in--Lady Wisdom sings--take note.

Don't busy yourself with trying to change the season, wishing the seasons would turn, turn, turn, or longing for days of seasons gone by. *Take note.* Take pleasure, where you are. *When* you are. As Lady Wisdom sings, "There is nothing better for them than to be happy and enjoy themselves as long as they live."

Which, I think, is a promise. A promise that when you take note of the season you are in, live in the season you are in, you will find joy and happiness, no matter the season. Joy in every season of life. There is, indeed, nothing better than that.

Amen.