

A Spiritual Spring for the Week

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Sermon Text: Ecclesiastes 3:1-14

Sermon Title: "The Keeper and Supplier of All Times"

Morrow Presbyterian Church, Morrow, GA

January 6, 2013

Since this the first Sunday of the New Year, it seems a good time to think about time. Time is something we measure using clocks and stopwatches, but nobody really knows what time is. We cannot hold time in our hands, although we might say we have a lot of time on our hands. We cannot stop time like we can stop a car or truck by applying a break, although occasionally minutes seem to go by like hours. We might read in a book that "time stopped" when something suddenly occurs to the main character. We live with this thing called time, and it will always rolls on from night to day to night to day.

The author of Ecclesiastes, known as The Preacher, chooses to say something about time and how it affects us all. He says that there is a time for everything. Every single thing we can think of, every piece of human experience fits within the framework of time. As The Preacher lists them, he mentions one experience such as life and then matches it with its polar opposite, death. Embracing and not embracing

are polar opposites, and so are mourning and dancing.

“There is a time to be born and a time to die,” verse 2 says. This speaks about our limited duration on earth, our mortality that lasts but a short while. There is a time to celebrate the beginning of a person’s life, and there is a time to wear black suits and ties and dresses and mourn a loved one who has gone on.

There is a time to plant and to pluck what is planted. Farmers know when to put the seeds in the ground, and then they know the exact time for harvesting their crops for all of us to enjoy. There is a time to weep and a time to laugh. None of us would laugh uncontrollably at a funeral, and none of us would fall apart in tears at a wedding or when The Falcons win the Super Bowl. There is a time to keep and to throw away, such as boxes and bags of junk we no longer need. There is a time to speak and to be silent, and we teach our children when the appropriate times are to speak and stay quiet.

Some of those human experiences that The Preacher lists we deal with on a regular basis. But what do we do with those experiences that are highly uncomfortable for us? The Preacher lists experiences that we don’t want to think about. “There is a time to kill,” verse 3 says, “and a time to heal.” What do we do with those experiences? Does a deranged gunman

have a right to shoot people, just because the Bible says there is a time to kill? Healing is easy for us, but the killing part is unsettling. What about “a time to love and a time to hate”? May we be justified in not forgiving somebody of the crimes they committed against us? Do we get to pick and choose who to love and who to hate, and never give love to anybody we dislike? What about “a time of war and a time of peace”? Don’t let North Korea hear about that one. Don’t give Iran any ideas. We’ll have a huge mess on our hands.

At the beginning of Chapter 3, The Preacher makes it clear that time itself serves the Lord. “There is a season, a time for every purpose under heaven.” We take this to mean that time and human experience are all under the supervision of the Lord. Whatever we do is done for God. Whatever happens on earth eventually is molded and shaped to serve the purposes of God. Later in Chapter 3, it says that God “has made everything beautiful in its time.” Eternity is in the hearts of those who know the Lord and his works.¹ “There is an elegance about how life works,” and life works because God is at work in life.² We can hardly fathom how God works in life. We get glimpses of it

¹ Cf. Ecclesiastes 3:11.

² Iain Provan, *The NIV Application Commentary: Ecclesiastes/Song of Solomon*, 90.

from time to time: when there is a birth, when there is gain/success, when a prayer is answered. But most of what the Lord does is beyond our comprehension. Only God is able to control time and all times. God oversees everything that happens in time, so that time and space enter eternity with God in all glory.

But still, what do we do with these phrases, “There is a time to kill, there is a time to hate, there is a time of war, etc.”? If God controls all times, does this mean that God wants wars to happen? Does it mean that God sanctions killing and hating and destroying?

Notice that when The Preacher says that there is a time for everything, he lists experiences that any human being may encounter, from the very good to the very bad. Nothing is left out. Each experience is an extreme: life and death, killing and healing, gaining and losing, keeping and throwing away. Sadly with any good we may experience, we may also experience its polar opposite. At one time we may weep our eyes out, feeling sorry for ourselves, but then we might weep because we are laughing so hard. At one point we might choose to tear down a relationship out of selfishness, but at some other time we may repent and choose to rebuild that relationship.

Whatever we experience, God experiences it with

us. God is not only in control of all times, God is also influenced by all times. God is affected by our warring, our hating, our destroying, just as much as we are. God weeps with us and mourns with us, as well as laughs and dances with us. God feels our sadness, our doubt, our hopelessness, our anger, our gloom. The God of all time and space is influenced by our experiences, because he chooses to be influenced by them.

This is because God seeks relationship with us. Our perfect, holy Creator wants a richly intimate association with all of us, but we are sinful people. That's the rub. We are not perfect as God is, and we tend to do what God doesn't want us to do. The only reason why there is warring and hating and destroying is because we choose to let these things happen. We choose to refrain from embracing – we choose to throw away. Yet again, God seeks relationships with us, and although he is not corrupted by our sin, God is influenced by it. God chooses to deal with us as broken, as messed-up, as imperfect as we are. God has infinite love and patience for us, and God chooses to deal with our times of sinning.

It is remarkable to imagine that the God of all creation, who is not touched by time or space, enters our time and space to work with us. The God who can

never be turned toward evil is constantly sorting out our evil, using his loving power to bring about good. We are still feeling the effects of what happened in Newtown, CT. We cannot imagine not having our children and grandchildren around for Christmas or in this New Year. The community in Newtown is still trying to find answers and more importantly trying to find stability. There was a time of death and killing back on December 14.

But even at that moment, God was present and he began to bring about life (polar opposite). God gave us a time to weep and mourn such tragedy, but also God wants us to never forget what happened and to move forward. God is giving strength to the families and community of Newtown, telling them to continue living. Continue to build up, continue to embrace, continue to share peace, continue to love. Whenever the evil extreme of human experiences is present, God is present to counteract with the most positive extreme. Love will always come after hate. Peace will always end a war. Even in death, there will be life once more, eternal and free. God can take any tragedy and make it beautiful. God can make us beautiful once more.

There is a time for everything, as imperfect or as

perfect as it may be; and God always has time for us. We measure time, but we do not have control over it. We discuss time, but never fully understand it. And so we cast ourselves back on God, “who holds our times in his hands and alone knows the span of our individual days.” Our God is good and he is for us (Romans 8:31). “Our response to his grace and blessing should be to seize the time we have and live it well and joyfully to [God’s] glory and praise.”³

³ Ibid., 101.

