

Sermon
17 May 2020
West Kirk of Calder/Polbeth Harwood

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Reading: Ecclesiastes 3:1-8;11-12;14a

Hymn: CH4 562 Through the love of God our Saviour

READING

Ecclesiastes 3:1-8;11-12;14a

There is a time for everything,
and a season for every activity under the heavens:
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,
a time to weep and a time to laugh,
a time to mourn and a time to dance,
a time to scatter stones and a time to gather them,
a time to embrace and a time to refrain from embracing,
a time to search and a time to give up,
a time to keep and a time to throw away,
a time to tear and a time to mend,
a time to be silent and a time to speak,
a time to love and a time to hate,

a time for war and a time for peace.

God has made everything beautiful in its time. He has also set eternity in the human heart; yet no one can fathom what God has done from beginning to end. I know that there is nothing better for people than to be happy and to do good while they live. I know that everything God does will endure for ever; nothing can be added to it and nothing taken from it...

MESSAGE

There is a time for everything... We all know this poem very well. We like to fall back on it in critical moments in our lives, when we want to reflect on the meaning of life.

The author was one of the wisdom teachers of his time, and that is exactly *why* he wrote this poem. He pondered on the *meaning* of life, and then he came to the conclusion that life can be divided into different times, into different seasons.

Some of these seasons we have control over, others we don't, but the important thing to remember is that all we can do is to make the best of the time we find ourselves in, and to remember that *all* our times are in God's hands.

Today I would like to reflect on the words of another poet too, namely TS Eliot. Eliot wrote his poem, *The Waste Land*, in

1918, during a time very similar to what we are going through at the moment, during the time of the Spanish flu; when more than 50 000 000 people all over the world died.

Eliot got the flu, and spent the next couple of years writing this poem. It starts off on a very dire note, saying that “April is the cruellest month” – reflecting on the fact that although it was spring outside and new life was visible everywhere in nature, people were experiencing the exact opposite in their own lives. Death and suffering.

But at the end of his poem we detect a shimmer of hope, when he says: “Shall I at least set my lands in order?”

The positive lies in *deciding* something, *doing* something. Like our Old Testament wisdom poet said too. Don’t just let life happen to you. *Live* it, to the best of your abilities.

I think it’s safe to say that we can describe our current time as a time of “crisis.” The word “crisis” accurately describes the journey we are on at the moment. And when we say “crisis”, we mean something like “catastrophe, calamity, despair”.

Medically, socially, economically *and* on a very personal level Covid-19 sent us all on a journey *nobody* saw coming.

But if we take a wee look at the journey the word “crisis” itself has been on, this might change our perspective a little.

The word “crisis” travelled to the English language all the way from Ancient Greece, via Rome. It comes from the Greek word *κρίσις (krísis)*, which means: “a separating, power of distinguishing, decision, choice, election, judgment, dispute”. And the word *krísis* comes from *κρίνω (krínō)*, which means to: “pick out, choose, decide, judge”.

In other words, originally the word crisis meant “a time to make decisions.”

And I think, that if we treat this time of crisis as a time to make decisions, we might be able to look at our current situation through different eyes.

Nobody wanted any of this to happen. But it did, *it is happening*, and there is nothing we can do about it. So instead of just despairing about it, why don't we use this time to make very important decisions? Decisions that will shape our future, for the better?

There is a time for everything. *Maybe* this time of crisis for humanity, is a time of rest for nature.

Eliot dreaded April, the month of spring that was supposed to bring hope into his life, but didn't. But, you know, I look at it differently. April is over now. It's May. The sun is shining and the trees are green. And despite what is going on in the world at the moment, *that* gives me hope. And the desire to want to do the right thing.

Because like our wisdom poet recognised thousands of years ago – life can be divided into seasons. Some of these we love, some of these we dread. But just like the seasons we enjoy don't last forever, the seasons we struggle to live through don't last forever either.

Lots of people are commenting on the fact that they can't wait for things to go back to normal. But I think that all of us are realising now, that *this* normal will have to look different to what we regarded as normal before. *We can't go back to where we were, we have to go to where we want to be.*

So let's use this time of crisis to decide where that is, what that means. And let's never lose hope, because through all the seasons of our lives, God is with us.

There is a time for everything. Maybe this is the time to turn to God, so that when we set our priorities for the future, we do it right this time.

Amen

PRAYER

Loving Father

You make yourself known to us,
and you are present in our lives,
even though we do not always recognise or acknowledge you.
For all that you are, we thank you, loving God.

You ensure that we are not alone
by filling us with your Spirit of truth,
that inspires and empowers us.

Thank you, Father, for your presence,
your love and your encouragement.

Dear Lord, we bring into your love
those who do not know you and your love;
those who have turned away from you;
those who struggle to accept you;
those who refuse to listen.

*May your love touch them,
and transform their lives.*

Dear Lord, we bring into your love
those who need your healing touch during this time of crisis:
Those who are struggling with loneliness;
Those who feel stir crazy;
Those who lost their jobs and are worried about feeding their
families;
Those who are unwell;
And those who lost loved ones.

*May your love touch them,
and transform their lives.*

Dear Lord, we bring into your love
those who are working hard to fight this pandemic:
Health workers, key workers, scientists,
As well as those who are going out of their way to make this
difficult time better for others:
Volunteers, carers, kind neighbours and friends.

*May your love touch them,
and transform their lives.*

And please be close to every single of us Lord,
as we deal with this crisis in our own way.

Help us to never lose hope and to always feel your love surround us.

Help us to make decisions now that will not only change our own lives, but the whole world, for the better.

May we show the power and presence of your love in our church, our community and our world – for Jesus' sake.

Amen

HYMN

CH4 562:1-3

Through the love of God, our Saviour,

All will be well.

Free and changeless is his favour;

All, all is well.

Precious is the blood that healed us,

Perfect is the grace that sealed us,

Strong the hand stretched forth to shield us;

All must be well.

Though we pass through tribulations,

All will be well.

Ours is such a full salvation,

All, all is well.

Happy still in God confiding,

Fruitful, if in Christ abiding,
Holy, through the Spirit's guiding;
All must be well.

We expect a bright tomorrow;
All will be well.

Faith can sing through days of sorrow,
'All, all is well.'

On our Father's love relying,
Jesus every need supplying,
In our living, in our dying,
All must be well.