

Not So Ordinary Times

Oak Grove Presbyterian Church, Rev. Dr. Anne Fisher

June 7, 2020, Ecclesiastes 3:1-15

Today is Trinity Sunday, not a well-known liturgical day but it begins the season of what we call Ordinary time. Ordinary time in the church space is between the fiery red Pentecost and Christ the King Sunday. This marks the end of the liturgical year before we begin Advent and Christmas. We know it as the green that seems to be prevalent in the church throughout the summer. I chose this scripture Ecclesiastes 3:1-15, to usher in this long ordinary season. I was also thinking about the irony of saying we are entering into Ordinary time when our lives and our times are far from Ordinary. I chose this passage from Ecclesiastes because even in the Ordinary and in the extraordinary times God's presence rules.

What I did not know when I selected this passage is that George Floyd would be killed while in police custody. What I did not know is the extraordinary mobilization of protesters around the world shouting "Black Lives Matter" in the wake of George Floyd's death. What I did not know was that I would witness police chiefs, mayors, governors and others would take a knee out of respect, not only for a man who was killed unjustly, but for all who have suffered injustice. And I certainly did not know that Rev. Al Sharpton would use these same scriptures in his Eulogy for George Floyd. So, with open eyes and hearts let us listen to God's words through the reading of Ecclesiastes Chapter 3.

For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven: ²a time to be born, and a time to die; a time to plant, and a time to pluck up what is planted; ³a time to kill, and a time to heal; a time to break down, and a time to build up; ⁴a time to weep, and a time to laugh; a time to mourn, and a time to dance; ⁵a time to throw away stones, and a time to gather stones together; a time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing; ⁶a time to seek, and a time to lose; a time to keep, and a time to throw away; ⁷a time to tear, and a time to sew; a time to keep silence, and a time to speak; ⁸a time to love, and a time to hate; a time for war, and a time for peace. ⁹What gain have the

workers from their toil? ¹⁰I have seen the business that God has given to everyone to be busy with.

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; ¹³moreover, it is God's gift that all should eat and drink and take pleasure in all their toil. ¹⁴I know that whatever God does endures forever; nothing can be added to it, nor anything taken from it; God has done this, so that all should stand in awe before him. ¹⁵That which is, already has been; that which is to be, already is; and God seeks out what has gone by.

This is the Word of the Lord; thanks be to God.

We are living in an unsettled time. How do we get our bearings? How do we know if it is time to plant or pluck up; a time to heal or a time to kill? How do we even know what time it is? As a colleague remarked, "The only way that I know what day it is, is when I hear the garbage truck!"

We have been through such a range of emotions in the past four months and particularly the past two weeks. We have experienced shock, despair, fear, confusion and inspiration. In this day when we enter what we call Ordinary Time, it is far from ordinary. What will our new normal look like?

We recognize we are in a tsunami of change whether we like it or not. It is coming fast and furious everywhere we look. Our health, our resources, our wealth, our neighborhoods do not seem as secure as they were four months ago. When such swift and turbulent change comes, it is hard to get our footing. It is difficult even to know what kind of church season we are in. Our hearts break due to the hatred and callousness of others. The generous spirit of strangers warms our hearts. We vacillate between our hearts breaking and our hearts expanding. We fear that nothing will change; we fear that everything will change.

We turn to the poetry of Ecclesiastes. That there is a time and a season for everything. Some of the seasons are not necessarily things that we want... killing, hatred, and war are not seasons that I would want to embrace. It

reminds us of the capacity of humanity to be capable of great and noble things as well as horrific and terrible actions. The message of Ecclesiastes is that in it all, God remains in charge. God is in all seasons.

Often, we stop reading when we get to “a time for war and a time for peace.” But, let us continue as Ecclesiastes goes on to explain. God remains a mystery to us and we cannot even fathom God’s greatness. God’s intent is for us to find joy. As I worked on this scripture before George Floyd’s Memorial Service, my heart filled with pain. Let us find our own way and embracing “there is a time for war and for peace.” How can we dance when there is so much trouble? There are people hurting, so wouldn’t it be frivolous to enjoy life?

At times like this, I then recall sitting with families who are devastated by the death of a loved one. These are times when we feel the weight of their loss. During the sadness, there are moments of lightheartedness as we remember a story or have a memory that is shared by those who loved that person. In those gatherings there is always a time of laughter. God has given us this gift to remember the past and to share in the present. So, we can shift from mourning to dancing and from sorrow to joy. It does not take away the power of our emotions. It does not take away from the work of the healing that needs to happen.

In a few moments, we will celebrate the sacrament of the Lord’s Supper. It was on the night that Jesus is about to be betrayed by one of his own, one who had heard his message and witnessed his miracles and healings. He had been with Jesus for three years and was about to turn Jesus over and walk away. It is a low moment for Jesus and for all. Yet Jesus takes that moment to plant into the hearts of those who were there (and those to follow), “a time to be still and a time to share. A time to be fed and a time to feed.” Out of Jesus’ ministry, comes the message of hope and promise for the ages. Remember, this time together and tell others.

As we move into this season which is not ordinary, we do well to embrace whatever we are feeling. We must realize that we can get discouraged and mourn the losses. We can look back over our shoulders and long for the time when we could sit and enjoy a visit over a cup of tea. For example, I can also

embrace the joy of the small victory of figuring out how my computer camera works! We take a moment to see the beauty of our world. And in this season of lament, we can travel between finding joy and knowing sorrow. We do so not to replace one for another, but to experience it all.

We hold in tension the mystery of God's infinite being that is beyond time. We hold the memory of what has come before us and a knowledge of what lays ahead of us. And God is part of all of that: where we are, where we were and where we are going.

Thank God that we have the Holy Spirit to guide and steer us to God's path rather than the using agenda of others. Thank God that we are not using our skewed points of view to come up with all the answers.

We are in a turbulent season. But God who is and was and will be, calls us to seek out joy and to find the goodness in life as we work to make it better.

However we change in our thoughts, prayers, and feelings over this not so ordinary season, we stand in humility and in awe of God whose presence is felt in all things.

I am looking forward to seeing how this "Ordinary time" in our liturgical year will play out. I am looking forward to our bolstering each other and being witnesses to the depth of beauty in living, even when circumstances try to pull us into despair. I am seeing this not so ordinary time that will be filled with the deep and difficult work of looking into our lives to find the ways that we can right the terrible wrongs and work toward justice. I am also hoping that we can find the rhythm and balance that the writer in Ecclesiastes knew well...that there will be a time to dance and a time for joy and a time to live the fullness of our lives.

Thanks be to God who is present in all the seasons.

In the name of the Trinity, God the Creator, Redeemer and Sustainer. Amen.