

Devotions – November 19-25, 2017

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Ecclesiastes 3:1-8

For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven:

Sunday, November 19, 2017

Text: Ecclesiastes 3:2

²a time to be born, and a time to die; a time to plant, and a time to pluck up what is planted;

In Spokane I drove past the corn fields with the huge combines cutting down the crops. A beige cloud hung over them and I thought about how not that long ago, those stalks had been tiny seedlings in the ground, stretching their quickly turning green leaves towards the sky. On that day I drove to the hospital where a friend was. She sat in an oversized chair, her body thin as a rail. As we prayed the old words of “Our Father,” her voice came in and out. When we finished we sat in silence for a while.

I am not in the season of my birth nor my death. I didn’t really know what to say to her, but I liked being with her in the quiet. Finally she spoke, not to me but to the room, “I am ready for the kingdom now.” Her eyes were bright at that moment, but they shone out of a worn body. I thought about the green shoots of corn reaching out towards the sky in the spring so vigorous for life and I thought about them now as their silage would recycle into the earth and their yellow ears would feed more life. I thought about my friend when she was born. The new-born wail that probably came from her, so hungry for life, and I thought about her now, tired and worn, ready for the journey that comes after life, leaving behind stories that would be recycled into the hearts of the people left behind. For everything there is a season.



Monday, November 20, 2017

Text: Ecclesiastes 3:3

³a time to kill, and a time to heal; a time to break down, and a time to build up;

In Minneapolis I sat in a high building with a Dakota woman who was also studying to be a pastor and we talked about fires. As we watched the pigeons fly from one building to the next she told me about how the fires destruction is so necessary because without it we would never see new creation. It is the fire that brings back the wild prairie flowers in the Dakotas, and the red hawk weed in Northern Minnesota. It is the fire and the destruction of the fire that rebuilds. I thought about the metaphorical fires in my own life, the ones I had caused and the ones that others had pushed upon me. I thought about the fires in our society which are fueled by violence and no one willing to sit and listen. I thought about the woman sitting next to me who was no longer scared of fires because she trusted the healing that would come afterwards. She would be part of the healing that came after whether it was her own body that had to be rebuilt, other people, or the broader society. Bad things happen. We can't control that but sometimes we can see those bad things as the fire and we can be the people who come after who help the rebirth and the growth. Sometimes out of tragedy the most beautiful things can occur.



Tuesday, November 21, 2017

Text: Ecclesiastes 3:4

⁴ a time to weep, and a time to laugh; a time to mourn, and a time to dance;

We know about the weeping but sometimes we forget about the dancing. In Welch, Minnesota, in the rolling farm country, we buried a 21 year old girl. With her, a part of our family collectively died. We wept like we never had before, in a way that stoic Norwegian farmers are not supposed to weep, the way that catches your breath and closes your chest up. I remembered the shortest line in the Bible. "Jesus wept." I wondered if he really had felt this kind of pain. Years later, it still catches me off guard. I will see things that remind me of Grayce and that familiar pain in my throat will come back. But I always remember that after Jesus wept, he raised Lazarus from the dead.

In the cold clear night, I walked out into the deep snow under the red pine trees. My big black dog followed me, and we saw the great moon rise to light up the cold land. I remembered Grayce's free spirit and how she loved the moon. "Remember that?" I asked my dog. The black dog stared back at me with vacant eyes. I patted my chest and he jumped up onto my parka and we danced around under the red pines. My sister who was late to meet us came up about then. She looked like a trapped animal trying to navigate the snow banks with boots too big. "Look at this dog dance!" I called to her. My dog stared at both of us with a dumb wagging tail. We both started to laugh.

After Jesus wept, he raised Lazarus from the dead, and so it is with us when grief causes little deaths in our own beings. There is a time to mourn but eventually we will find our way to laughter because that is Christ's way of giving our broken hearts their well-deserved resurrection.



Wednesday, November 22, 2017

Text: *Ecclesiastes 3:5*

⁵*a time to throw away stones, and a time to gather stones together; a time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing;*

When children are little we often teach them to apologize, to say “I’m sorry.” Then the other child is usually expected to say, “I forgive you,” or “It’s alright.” Sometimes, when we are adults we find that hard. Often, we can say the words just fine but then feeling it in our hearts is a different thing. This happens whether we are asking for forgiveness or forgiving. These things can build up over the years into quiet, angry desperation. We know Jesus’ plea that even before we come into our sacred places of worship we ought to “leave your gift there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother or sister, and then come and offer your gift,”(Mathew 5:24 NRSV) but sometimes it’s so hard. There is a time to embrace and there is a time to refrain from embracing. Maybe sometimes we offer our false forgiveness too fast. Healing is a process and perhaps before we embrace we have to spend some time alone finding our own peace concerning whatever happened with our brother or sister.



Thursday, November 23, 2017

Text: *Ecclesiastes 3:6*

⁶*a time to seek, and a time to lose; a time to keep, and a time to throw away;*

My mother called me a few years ago nearly weeping. She had all of her three daughters elementary school projects sprawled out on the living room floor and she was trying to figure out what to throw away and what to keep in order to make more space in her house for life that kept moving forward.

“Just put it all away,” I said, perturbed to hear her crying over the phone. In the years since, my mother has cleared out those boxes and life has moved along. We are in a new place in our relationship as we all grow older. I guess we have found our peace regarding what is to be kept and what is to be thrown away not just with the boxes, but in relationship with one another. People we love change over time and our relationships change to adapt. We have to be brave. We have to realize what we have lost in relationships and seek what is new in them. We have to

keep what is sacred and safe for us and sometimes, as Jesus says in Mathew 18:17, we have to let go what might be toxic.



Friday, November 24, 2017

Text: *Ecclesiastes 3:7*

⁷*a time to tear, and a time to sew; a time to keep silence, and a time to speak;*

He drove me nuts. He always drove me nuts. My uncle is a man who always is right and no one else is. Over the years we stopped listening to him. He would say something, and my family would just override him with loud conversation, changing whatever topic he had brought up on all sides. We didn't want to listen to how we were all going down the wrong path. In my uncle's view, both the Lutheran pastor and the Atheist fashion designer nieces were doing the wrong thing with their lives. You just couldn't do right in his mind and then one day I decided to listen. Well, I am giving myself too much credit. It is not that I really decided to listen; it is more that I was cornered. And so he talked at me for an hour, and this is what I learned. It turned out that it wasn't about me. These insults, thinly veiled as words of advice directed towards me, came from his own place of fear, of being bullied his whole life, of being talked down to most of his childhood, of no one thinking he would really amount to anything. This was his pain not mine, and when it came out sideways at his family members, it was because he didn't know what else to do.

There is a time to speak. There is definitely a time to be bold, but sometimes, even when you know it might be boring or frustrating, there is a time to keep silent, and in that silence God often gives us clarity concerning the other. It is so often in listening, whether we agree or not, that we find our compassion.



Saturday, November 25, 2017

Text: *Ecclesiastes 3:8*

⁸*a time to love, and a time to hate; a time for war, and a time for peace.*

I remember when I was young and this country seemed much more stable. I remember that time of peace. I have been so lucky to travel a large part of the world and this country. It could be worse. I speak from experience when I say our country could be more divided. We could be angrier at one another than we already are, but I also have to say it is hard right now. It

is hard when members of our own households find rifts with each other because of political views, when we don't feel like we can talk to our neighbor as we once did. It is hard to live in a country that is so tense. There is a time for peace, there is also a time for upheaval. Just like the forest fires give way to new creation, we must tolerate both of these spaces in our society.

I love Ecclesiastes because it reminds us of the seasons, both in our lives and in our society. It reminds us how deep the experience of being human is. We will experience all of this; birth, death, the sowing and the harvest, the breaking and the building up, the weeping and the laughter, the rage and the times of peace. Do not be afraid of any of these aspects of your humanity because if you hand all of it over to God, God will find a way to use it for what is good in the world. To be a child of God means that we experience life deeply, boldly, and without fear, because the one constant in our lives is that God is in everything. God is in every season, and for that; Thanks be to God.

