

## Everything Has Its Time-A Lenten Study St. James Presbyterian Church

Eccl. 3:8 is our selected text

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

2 a time to be born, and a time to die;

a time to plant, and a time to pluck up what is planted;

3 a time to kill, and a time to heal;

a time to break down, and a time to build up;

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

a time to mourn, and a time to dance;

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;

6 a time to seek, and a time to lose;

a time to keep, and a time to throw away;

7 a time to tear, and a time to sew;

a time to keep silence, and a time to speak;

**8 a time to love, and a time to hate;**

a time for war, and a time for peace.

This text speaks to the inevitability of life. The season of life as outlined here begins simply with life and death. But the rest of 1-8 is a litany of things that will occur between the bookends of life and death. At this point in Hebrew history there is no belief in the afterlife, only the legacy of a life well lived. It is this legacy that not just you are known by, but it is the legacy/reputation by which your family and inheritants will be known.

In a society in which people depended upon one another for not just everyday existence but in covenant relationship with God what does this mean?

Although our society claims to be different from that which this text had everyday meaning and wisdom:

1. What would it mean for your family history if your family were known as the family that loved?
2. What would it mean for your family history if your family was known as the family that hated?
3. How do you think it would effect how you view the world if you were expected to be the kind of person that loved or could be loved, vs. the kind of person that hated or could be hated?
4. Who are the people in our society that we deem lovable or who is it that our society tells us it is all right to hate?
5. Are we stuck in the inevitability of categorizing people in these ways?

## Love

*John 15:9-17* As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you; abide in my love. 10 If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love. 11 I have said these things to you so that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete. 12 'This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. 13 No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends. 14 You are my friends if you do what I command you. 15 I do not call you servants any longer, because the servant does not know what the master is doing; but I have called you friends, because I have made known to you everything that I have heard from my Father. 16 You did not choose me but I chose you. And I appointed you to go and bear fruit, fruit that will last, so that the Father will give you whatever you ask him in my name. 17 I am giving you these commands so that you may love one another.

The book of John very clearly tells us that Jesus has come to fulfill God's promise and in chapter 15 verses 9-17 there is a shift from the inevitability of our situations be they good or bad, and a focus on the quality of our life together. Ecclesiastes tells us there *is a time for love*, and Jesus tells us that the *time to love* is always. This is not a new way to be in covenant relationship with God in community, but it is in fact the primary way to bear the fruit that God has planted in God's children.

When we focus on following the commandment to love at all times it helps to remember that this is a spiritual call this love ethic and that it is a powerful shift that must start on the inside.

1. Can anyone explain how it feels to love as Christ commanded?
2. What do you think is meant by, "and that your joy may be complete"?
3. We have so many issues facing us today. When this text was written the claim to come together and "lay down one's life for one's friends" was a very real and necessary oath for a community that went against the grain in an empire. What does it mean for us today to "lay down one's life for one's friends"?

## Hate Titus 3

### Maintain Good Deeds

*3Remind them to be subject to rulers and authorities, to be obedient, to be ready for every good work, 2to speak evil of no one, to avoid quarrelling, to be gentle, and to show every courtesy to everyone. 3For we ourselves were once foolish, disobedient, led astray, slaves to various passions and pleasures, passing our days in malice and envy, despicable, **hating** one another. 4But when the goodness and loving-kindness of God our Savior appeared, 5he saved us, not because of any works of righteousness that we had done, but according to his mercy, through the water of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit. 6This Spirit he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, 7so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life. 8The saying is sure.*

*I desire that you insist on these things, so that those who have come to believe in God may be careful to devote themselves to good works; these things are excellent and profitable to everyone. 9But avoid stupid controversies, genealogies, dissensions, and quarrels about the law, for they are unprofitable and worthless. 10After a first and second admonition, have nothing more to do with anyone who causes divisions, 11since you know that such a person is perverted and sinful, being self-condemned.*

Before we start to think too literally about this text and start imagining the people in our lives that pop into our minds when we hear it, let's give it a little context. This letter was written to instruct the leaders of a Jewish-Christian community, urging them to correct their false teachings, the distortion of the gospel by including Jewish stories as well as arguing over Jewish law and how new Jesus followers are brought into community. One of the things this text can help us think about is how easy it is to stray from the love ethic. We are after all human and are called to strive to be in line with God's will. But there is a way to express this love and that is by doing good works. Not just good deeds but caring for each other, both in and out of our churches.

1. Ecclesiastes claims that there is a time to hate and that may be so. The question is does hate build us up or tear us down?
2. Why do you think this text tells us to do good works that are "excellent and profitable to everyone?"
3. How does doing good works in this way keep us from being falling into the prideful trap of thinking "Aren't I wonderful, look what I did for that person or cause"?
4. Verse 10 and 11 tells us to "have nothing more to do with anyone who causes divisions". How do we love those with whom we disagree and from whom we are called to separate ourselves?

## Conclusion

Ecclesiastes paired with these texts with from the Gospel of John and the Epistle Titus is a wonderful exercise. One thing we can take away is that although there is a time to love and a time to hate, the Christian community is not just called to “make” it through the cycle of life as presented by Ecclesiastes. We are called to bring a quality of life for all into that cycle as called for by the love ethic and doing good works for the good of all humankind.

What are some thoughts that you will leave here with tonight, thinking of these texts as we discussed them?