



A Time For Everything

Wildwood Mennonite Church // January 3, 2021

Worship Leader: Glade P // Music Leader: Brenda M // Sermon: Joe H

Welcome to Wildwood!

Welcome to each and everyone out there that has chosen to join us this morning. We know you come from all over. Different parts of the city, province, country, world. You are all welcome here. It never fails to delight me knowing that you are all here, especially under this format, not because you have to be, but because you want to be. We hope and pray each of us gets what we desire this morning.

Music For Meditation // ["Turn, Turn, Turn"](#) // Sung by Judy Collins

Call to Worship

This year...
Recognize your uniqueness
Offer your support to someone who needs it
Keep going
Focus on love, forgiveness, and peace
Keep growing
Steer clear of people and things that wound you
See the love around you
Strive to be happy
Speak and be heard
Support what is right in the face of what is wrong
Look forward and live for today

Song // ["We Three Kings"](#) // Sung by Clamavi De Profundis

Offering Prayer

2nd Corinthians 9:7. *Each of us should give what we have decided in our heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.*

Amen.

Children's Story // [Click here for video storytime with Marg E!](#)

This week's story is ["Three Wise Women"](#) by Mary Hoffman and Lynn Russell.

Scripture // Inclusive Bible translation

Ecclesiastes 3:1-8

*There is a time for everything,
a season for every purpose under heaven:*

*a season to be born and a season to die;
a season to plant and a season to harvest;
a season to hurt and a season to heal;
a season to tear down and a season to build up;
a season to cry and a season to laugh;
a season to mourn and a season to dance;
a season to scatter stones and a season to gather them;
a season for holding close and a season for holding back;
a season to seek and a season to lose;
a season to keep and a season to throw away;
a season to tear and a season to mend;
a season to be silent and a season to speak;
a season to love and a season to hate;
a season for hostilities and a season for peace.*

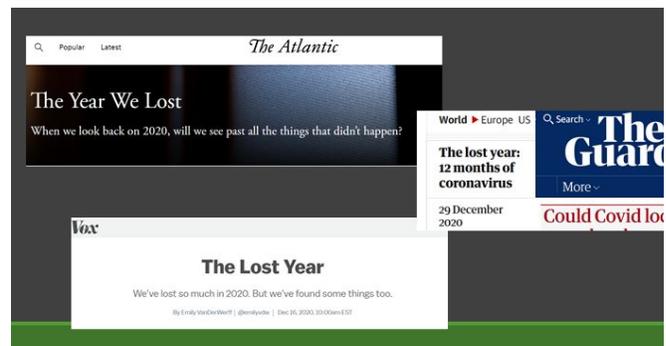
Reflection Time // “Everything” // Joe Heikman

(If you’d rather watch than read, the video version will be posted to the wildwoodmennonite.org website after the service, hopefully by Tuesday)

Instead of our usual video sermon this morning, I’m going to lead us in a live exercise of reflecting on the year behind us. You may choose to follow along with the handout (included at the bottom of this document for you to print) or to make your own notes on a piece of paper.

We’re going to spend some time sitting with that scripture text from Ecclesiastes, “There is a time for everything, a season for every purpose under heaven.”

I imagine many of you have, like me, seen this week a whole bunch of headlines and articles looking back on 2020. And, unsurprisingly, these reports are quite negative. “The Lost Year” was the most common expression that I saw. And we have lost so much this year, it’s true. Practical, day-to-day losses, of basic routines and connections we took for granted.



Big-picture losses--it's not overly dramatic to describe a collective loss of optimism and innocence about the safety and goodness of the world. And of course the indescribable loss of nearly 2 million lives around the world, and all of the other consequences of the pandemic.



"Death To 2020" - that's the Netflix special that my computer has been begging for me to watch for the past two weeks.

It's been a dumpster fire of a year. A year best put behind us while we move on as quickly as possible, here's to better things in 2021!

I get that sentiment, for sure. Enough of this already.

And yet, I wonder if that approach is going to be all that helpful.

From my experience, one of the tools that counselors and therapists use to help people is inviting them to consider different ways of telling the same story.

If I'm struggling with my goal of exercising more regularly, for example, I might see that as a failure of discipline, that I lack the willpower to do what I know I should do. And so I feel like a failure, because I choose to sit on the couch and watch tv instead of exercising. I'm too lazy, too soft.

And that might be true, I could make different choices if I had more willpower and discipline.

But a friend or counselor might encourage me to look at it differently. The reason I'm so tired at the end of the day is because I've spent my day looking after my kids, cleaning the house, packing lunches, etc. Those things take discipline and willpower, too. So maybe the story is that I *am making choices*, I'm just putting different priorities ahead of exercising. Feeling too tired to exercise might mean that I'm just a lazy bum, but it might mean that I'm already working really hard at different things.



That's a very different way to look at the situation. Of course that doesn't solve everything, I still have to make different choices if I want to get more exercise. (And that second story comes with its own set of challenges as well...) But with two ways of looking at the problem, I can see the problem differently, I can see that I am already making some good choices, which is the thing I wanted to do in the first place.

Seeing another story turns our situation, loosens it just a little bit. Thinking differently about something can create enough space to begin to shape it into something closer to what we want. At the very least, it can help to keep us from getting stuck, to see that a different way is possible. That is one path to move from loss and impotence towards healing and opportunity.

That's what I hear the ancient Teacher of the book of Ecclesiastes inviting us into.

*2020: "There is a time for everything,
a season for every purpose under heaven"*

So maybe 2020 was "The Lost Year". And maybe there were a lot of other things happening as well, things that are also purposeful and meaningful.

The story that we choose to tell about the year makes a difference in our experience of it, and how we choose to move forward. Looking for different ways to tell the story will open us to greater possibilities.

So I'm going to lead us through this poem, line by line, inviting us to take another look at the story of 2020.

With each line, I invite you to write down one or two things from the past year that fit into each category that the poet describes. Those could be something from our shared experiences as a community, could be something personal to you.

a time to be born, or a time to give birth.

This one is quite literal, for many. My family welcomed a niece and two nephews in 2020. There were several births in our congregation, too, some into families that you may have forgotten were even pregnant. :)

Other things were born in 2020, too--new businesses, new friendships, new routines. New life was everywhere this year, and it felt so good to be out in the middle of that this spring, summer and fall.

...and a time to die.

The numbers are staggering, to the point of being incomprehensible. It's not just the pandemic, either. People died in 2020, a whole lot of them, for a whole lot of reasons. Most of them we don't know. Many we do. Our Eternity Sunday service in November had a long list of people we care about who are no longer with us. My Grandpa Horst is one of those.

a time to plant

Again, this is literal for many of us. My family spent a lot of time and energy this summer replacing the grass in our front yard with a mulched bed with flowers and shrubbery. Keri did all of the planting, but I did a bunch of digging and hauling dirt, so I'm going to count that. :)

...and a time to harvest

As I recall, this was a banner year for the harvest in Saskatchewan. And we found a ton of Saskatoon berries to pick off of the trees during several long hikes this summer.

And with all the pandemic uncertainty, most of us gained a new-found appreciation for the essential workers in the grocery stores and supply chains. It takes so much effort to get the things we need from the fields into our cupboards. That awareness is something I hope to carry with me.

a time to hurt

Breonna Taylor. Ahmaud Arbery. George Floyd. Jacob Blake. And so many others. Many of us had our eyes opened to ongoing suffering that we had long overlooked. It is tempting to try to move quickly past the pain towards what we think are solutions, but sometimes there's nothing to do but sit with the hurt for a while.

...and a time to heal

This summer was very healing for me, personally. We spent a ton of time outdoors in the fresh air and warm sunshine. After the months of feeling cooped up, especially with schooling from home, finding beauty and relaxation outdoors, even close to home, was so good for my spirit.

a time to tear down

Many of us had our eyes opened this year to the ongoing realities of white supremacy, not just in the US but right here as well, in our province, our city, our minds and souls. There are things that need to be torn down, institutions, systems, attitudes. That is going to be costly. But not tearing them down costs us even more.

...and a time to build up

The flip side of the tearing down is building up new and better ways of living together. I am so encouraged by the leaders that have risen up this past year--or, more accurately, they haven't risen up so much as the rest of us have begun to pay attention and get behind the work that they've already been doing.

Recovery and Rebuilding are already the buzzwords of 2021, and there is much to learn from the foundations that have been laid this year by diverse leadership near and far.

a time to cry

I cried during many of the sermons that I wrote in 2020. That was actually one of the benefits of a year of Zoom worship--being in an empty room removed some of the social cues that keep emotions locked up so tight for me. Most of the time, the tears came as I was writing. I cried in frustration in trying to find words of hope in dark times. And I cried at the inspiration that came from Spirit speaking deep truths that rose to the surface in spite of my natural pessimism.

In spite of the distance between us, our tears have brought us together this year.

...and a time to laugh

Laughter has brought us together as well. Our Christmas banquet was so much fun. It's probably a good thing that I can't actually remember any of the jokes that Rick and Marg shared that evening, but I remember the laughter.

I also enjoyed the art of many comedians throughout the pandemic, and especially the US elections. Laughter was very helpful in processing everything that came at us this year, calling attention to the strangeness of it all, easing the tension, reminding us that we are not alone.

I enjoyed much laughter from my kids this year as well, and am grateful that most of the time they're still laughing with me and not at me. Most of the time.

a time to mourn

Underneath all of the pandemic fears this year, for me, has been the growing despair of the climate crisis. I was hopeful that this would be a year of progress towards reducing our carbon output, but it seems like at least some of that has taken a backseat to the urgency of the pandemic. The consequences of climate change caused a lot of damage this year. It feels like we're not doing enough, and voices that I respect are warning that this is only the beginning. I don't know if mourning is the most helpful response, but that's what I've felt this year.

...and a time to dance

We danced this year, remember that? We banged our pots and pans to celebrate essential workers and front-line care-givers. We danced in our living rooms for exercise when the playgrounds were closed. We danced in the streets to protest some political realities and to celebrate others. And we did many, many awkward dances of social distancing--no, you go first, okay fine just back off and I'll hold my breath while I sneak past you...

a time to throw stones

Now this one is tricky. I'm pretty sure that for the ancient poet this is a reference to the practice of stoning people who had broken certain laws. That sounds, and is, barbaric.

But I get it, the anger at injustice, the outrage at those who flaunt the rules, the fury against those who would lie and cheat and steal their way to self-gratification at the expense of the community.

Some people literally threw stones this year. For me, I cursed at politicians, I raged--or at least ranted--against the machine. I donated to causes that I hoped would help to right the wrongs.

...and a time to gather them

Back in March, when churches and everything else shut down, I thought that was pretty much it. There's not much a church can do when we can't get together, right?

But we sent out some emails. And some of us found our way to Zoom. And we told others about Zoom church and helped them get here, too. And we tried some other stuff that worked, and lots that didn't. And we found ways to connect with people that can't get online. And we said some farewells to those who had to leave, and some hellos to those looking for a new place to connect.

And looking back, it turns out that we did pretty much everything that we do as a church this year, in some form or another.

Far beyond the church, we became inventors, artists, creators, builders, helpers. Not by holding the original building together, but by picking up whatever fallen stones we could reach and making good use of what we had.

(In the interest of time, I'm going to skip down a few lines...)

a time to tear...

I read this one as a reference to the cultural practice of "sackcloth and ashes." When something really bad happened, a person might tear off their clothes in outrage, to sit in their grief wearing nothing but rags, a public display of mourning or protest or repentance.

I saw that need for public expression in the rallies that popped up in our city throughout the year. With some of them, I'm in agreement with their protests, and with some I'm definitely against. Either way, I resonate with that feeling of needing to express something publicly.

Those expressions looked different this year, but I found ways to make my laments and frustrations public as well.

...and a time to mend

I'm more invested in US politics than most people, as that's where I'm from and where my family still is. I have no idea if Joe Biden will be a good president or not, or if he'll be able to practice what he preaches. But his acceptance speech after the election was finally called really resonated with me, that desire to bring people together, to focus on our common needs and goals, to work for the good of all.

That work of mending is always in front of us, here in Canada as well, but steps were taken in 2020, and that is very good.

a time to be silent

I was silent as I walked beside several different rivers. As I watched a meteor shower. As I listened to my kids play and read. As I tried to catch fish, and as I listened to others brag about the fish that they caught. There were lots of spaces for quiet this year.

and a time to speak.

Thanks for listening to my words this year. Being obligated to write words to speak out loud has been very life-giving to me most weeks.

Beyond writing sermons, it has often been hard to find words to say to people, more than the usual small talk about pandemic life. I can think of a few times where I've reached out to friends for conversations that have been very meaningful.

A time to love...

And a time to hate...

A time for battle

I've felt quite useless in the "big struggles" of 2020. So I am very grateful for the health care workers who have fought the odds to bring healing and hope. And to the scientists who have worked so quickly to understand COVID-19 and create preventative measures, treatments and vaccines. And to everyone who has faced our collective struggles with courage, determination and compassion. We have faced conflict, and done that well.

And a time for peace

I felt peace in good books and good music. In resting after a long workout. In sitting on a sandbar by the river. In words of reassurance from Dr Shahab and other health care leaders. In backyard firepit conversations with good friends. In reports of social justice workers near and far.

And in preparing for our fall sermon series on being People of God's Peace, I found inspiration in researching the long tradition of peace-makers in the name of Jesus.

And that's the end of the poem. I felt rushed as we went through it, so perhaps you can find some time later to go deeper if you would like.

The Teacher of Ecclesiastes follows up their poem with this thought:

What do workers gain from their efforts? I have reflected on this while learning all the kinds of work God gives to humankind. God makes everything beautiful in God's time; yet although the Almighty has imbued eternity in our soul, we are unable to grasp the whole of God's work from beginning to end.

What I do know is that what is best for us is to be happy and enjoy life as long as we live. And God's gift to us is to eat and drink and find fulfillment in our work. I understand that whatever God does will endure for eternity; nothing can be added to it, nothing can be taken away. God makes it this way to keep reverence for the sacred alive in us.

*That which is, has always been;
that which is to be, has already been;
and God calls the past back into existence.*

It seems to me, that in recognizing that there is a season for everything, in exploring the earthy details of that poem, the Teacher has also realized that there is Everything in Every Season.

Not that every season is the same, but within each time there is a possibility of something else, something more: "That which is, has always been; that which is to be, has already been." But rather than seeing that as despair, of history doomed to repeat itself, the Teacher sees that as witness to the Spirit of God, the divine spark that exists in all things.

And so that is my hope, that when we look back at 2020 and all of its challenges, we will see the Spirit of God at work, sustaining us and walking with us in every season.

May God go with us into the new year, as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world without end. Amen.

Song of Response // ["We Dream of a Turning"](#) // *Voices Together* #209

Sharing Time

Not hearing from one another in person through the Sharing Time is a significant loss for many of us. Sharing items can be emailed to the church office or the pastors to be shared with the congregation. If you're able, join us for our Sunday Morning Zoom gatherings, or check your email for the sharing items from last Sunday. Or maybe now would be a good time to pause your reading to call someone from church or elsewhere that you haven't heard from this week.

Congregational Prayer // Eileen Klaassen

*God of ancient times, and God of the present,
We look back on the year that has been,
And recognize it as a season of hurt, a season of tears,
a season of mourning, a season of pruning.
But like the ninebarks that need to be pruned in the spring,
Taking out the old, dead branches that are no longer conducive to growth,
Leaving it looking greatly diminished and naked to the winds that blow,
It is the pruning that allows it to grow to into its own fullness,
To blossom and become laden with new seeds,
A strong and healthy plant; a beautiful shrub that brings much joy!
But even though it often feels like it -
and the world around us brings constant reminders of that! -
the year has been more than a season of tearing down.
It has been a season of pulling back on life's frenzy,
A time to reassess our priorities,
A time to turn inward and reflect,
A time to mend, a time to heal.
The season has brought new challenges, new opportunities!
It has been a season of new adventures,
Of road trips within our own province, and skating on outdoors rinks,
Walking, and biking, and backyard gatherings around a blazing fire.
It has also been a season of building up,
Of strengthened relationships, and certainly a reminder of the love that we share
With friends, with family, and within our congregation.
It has been a time when the world has worked together as never before,
To pool its resources, its expertise,
and develop vaccines to benefit us all!
This morning we remember and pray especially for...
We are grateful for...
Jesus, you have entered our world, and it has made all the difference,*





*For you have brought loving kindness and goodness into it.
You have brought the assurance that we are not alone;
That, come what may, you are always present with us.
You have brought hope for a better world
and stirred us to consider new ways of thinking;
new ways of being; new ways of living.
You have stirred up a trust within:*

*that you can take even those experiences which are challenging -
every experience - and use it for good.*

*You have brought to settle, deep within our hearts,
a feeling of peace and calm -
because you have come to us, you come to us still,
and you remain with us always.*

Lord Jesus Christ, accept our gratitude and our praise, we pray. Amen.

Song // ["The Hallelujah Chorus" from Handel's Messiah](#) // from *Tafelmusik*

Benediction // Sing the Journey #178

May the beauty of God be reflected in your eyes,
The love of God be reflected in your hands,
The wisdom of God be reflected in your words,
And the knowledge of God flow from your heart
that all might see and believe.
Amen

There is a Time for Everything... A Season for Every Purpose under Heaven

2020 has been a year filled with so much of, well, *everything*. Looking back at the year as you remember it, what are one or two things that you remember for each of these categories listed by The Teacher in Ecclesiastes 3?

a time to be born

and a time to die;

a time to plant

and a time to harvest;

a time to hurt

and a time to heal;

a time to tear down

and a time to build up;

a time to cry

and a time to laugh;

a time to mourn

and a time to dance;

a time to cast stones

and a time to gather them;

a time for holding close

and a time for holding back;

a time to seek

and a time to lose;

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 hostilities

and a time for peace.