

“One Change for the New Year”

Ecclesiastes 3:1-15

Sometimes a ticking clock is the loudest thing in the room. In a sense I mean that quite literally. When everything else is quiet, you hear the clock ticking away the time. We recently inherited a mantle clock that is in the living room now, and when the house is silent, you can hear the clock tick from the across the room. At night, sometimes in the very quiet hours, I can hear my battery watch, ticking quietly each second that passes. There have been some nights where I had to put it in the sock drawer because the sound became maddening, and I could not sleep.

Sometimes a ticking clock is the loudest thing in the room, literally and *figuratively*. Waiting for the time to pass. On New Year’s Eve we watched the clock as it counted down to the stroke of midnight, and the ball dropped, and the city lit up with fireworks. Eight years ago Caitlin and I went to New York on New Year’s Eve to stand with the crowd and ring in the New Year in a madhouse of confetti, and whistles, and cheers, and music. Last week, we fought to stay awake until moment came, knowing that the kids would be up at dawn. Just after midnight, I came and rang the church bell, to “ring in the year,” then went to sleep.

When you are waiting, the clock can be the loudest thing in the room. Sometimes it is the birth of a child, and sometimes the passing of one you love: the tick, tick, tick marks the time. When you are deep in thought, wondering how you got where you are, or what the next step should be, the world falls silent except for the ticking of the clock. Time, as the saying goes, marches inexorably on. The French composer Hector Berlioz said, “Time is a great teacher. Unfortunately it kills all its pupils.” The writer of the Ecclesiastes, known to us by the Hebrew “Qohelet” wrote, “[there is] a time to be born and a time to die.” No doubt that is true for all of us.

But in between there a time to live, a day to seize, a moment to recognize, decisions to make, dreams to chase, hopes to fulfill, things to do, places to go, people to love. Qohelet follows his pronouncement with a list of times and seasons: planting and plucking up, killing and healing, breaking down and building up, weeping and laughing, mourning and dancing, throwing away and gathering together, embracing and refraining from embracing, keeping and tossing, keeping and discarding, tearing and sewing, speaking and keeping silence, loving and hating, making war and making peace. There is a time for every matter under heaven.

The ticking of the clock begs the question, “What time is it now?” As the clocks ticks in the silent room of your discernment, or of your tossing and turning, the question cries out, “What time is it? What season of life is it?” When the ball drops on New Year’s Eve, we know that it’s midnight, and the New Year has begun. But the behind that stirs a question in the soul, “What time is it?” What season are we in? What season am I in? Is it time to weep or laugh? Time to build up or break down? Time to keep or throw away? Is it time to speak or keep silent?”

The good news in this is that change is always possible. The seasons are always changing, time is always moving, and you and I have the possibility for change. One of the most hopeless feelings in the world is that nothing will ever change. And if nothing ever changes, then why bother? But it could not be farther from the truth! The truth is everything will change... eventually. Change is not just possible. Change is inevitable. And you and I can change, for the better. We often cannot circumstances, we can rarely

change other people, but we can always change. You can change... Or perhaps better said, you can *be changed*.

Now this is not quite what Ecclesiastes is saying. Qohelet's vision of human life in Ecclesiastes is ultimately a dim vision, a vision that nothing ever changes under the sun. "Vanity, vanity, all is vanity." That phrase is not talking about self-absorption, it's talking about meaninglessness. "It's always the same anyway, so why bother?" Some call Qohelet a realist; he is simply seeing things for what they are. Read a book of history, and then read the newspaper – it all looks the same. And some call Qohelet a cynic. He's the biblical version of John Stewart and the Daily Show, just less funny. The only thing left to do in a world that won't change is have a few laughs and enjoy yourself. And some say Qohelet is right, whether he be realist or cynic. Nothing ever changes. Seasons come and go, but the world stays the same.

To be sure, it often looks that way. Yet, by faith I cannot say it is that way. Because of my faith in Jesus Christ, I believe that change is possible. I believe that I can be changed; I believe that you can be changed; and through me and through you, the world can be changed. Jesus Christ rewrites the rules of time. He came from eternity and entered into time, he *broke* into time like barging into a room with no doors in order to change the rules. Jesus went to the cross, then to the tomb, and then to Easter Sunday to *rewrite* the wisdom of the ages. Once it read, "There is a time to be born, and a time to die." Now it reads, "There is a time to be born, and a time to die, and time to rise again!"

New life is possible because Christ offers it to us; Christ gives us his new life. Life is no longer confined between the womb and the tomb. For Christ came that those who believe in him should have everlasting life, should share his resurrected life. Life is no longer vanity, vanity, because Christ infuses it with meaning and possibility and eternal purpose. Christ came to bring life, and life abundantly.

Change is possible, because Christ has made it possible. He gives us his Spirit, he gives us his mind, he gives us his power, and he makes it possible for us to be changed. Now the change does not begin with us, and it does not belong to us. Change belongs to God. One of the great truths of the 12 step programs is that I am powerless to change myself. I cannot bring about the change I want; and if I try, I will go down the road with Qohelet and find that nothing changes under the sun, or under my roof. But if I turn my life over to God, then change is possible. God can make the difference that I cannot make. Through Christ, all things are possible.

As we begin this New Year, the clock is ticking stirring the question in the soul, what time is it? What season is it? What season is it in your life? As we come to this Communion table today, I invite you to ask Christ to make it a season of new life for you. Ask Christ to be the difference you cannot make, to bring change to the place you need it most. He promises that when we drink the cup he gives us, we will never thirst again; and if we eat the bread he gives, we will never be hungry again. He promises to rewrite the seasons and make all things new. May Christ make this a season of new life for you. Amen.