

No Ordinary Time
Ecclesiastes 3:1–8, 11, 14
Sunday, June 20, 2021

So today is the first day of summer. School is out. The little league season has ended. Kids are going away to camp. Families are going away on vacation. Things are starting to slow down a little bit. The summer is typically a time when the pace of life settles down and is a little more relaxed. There is a little more leisure time. There's not as much going on.

That has typically been the case in the church, too. In a normal year, the program year would just be ending. Sunday School and youth group would be breaking for the summer. The Deacons and the choir take the summer off. Supper at St. John's is off until the fall. We get through the frantic busyness of Horse Show parking and then things settle down a little until September. A lot of people go away for a few months, and there's not as much going on.

The liturgical calendar refers to this season in the life of the church as Ordinary Time. We have just finished the six-month run of Advent to Christmas to Epiphany to the Baptism of the Lord to Lent to Easter to the Ascension to Pentecost – these big, important high holy days that come one after another – and now we have entered into a time when there aren't any holy days until November. Typically, we think of Ordinary Time as a time in which things slow down and there's not as much going on. Even the name conveys this – *Ordinary* Time. Sounds kind of *boring*.

But there is nothing *ordinary* about this time! The name Ordinary Time refers to the “ordinal numbers” by which the weeks are counted (first, second, third, etc.). It doesn't mean *normal* or *boring*, it means *ordered*. We are in *ordered time*.

The liturgical calendar follows the life and story of Jesus. It starts with Advent, as we anticipate the coming of Christ at Christmas. Then it takes us through Epiphany, as the glory of God is revealed to the world and made known to the nations. Then it takes us through the death and resurrection of Christ in Lent and Easter. The ascension of Jesus into heaven after his resurrection, and the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. And the church year *ends* with Christ the King Sunday, as Christ is celebrated as King of kings and Lord of lords, ruling and reigning over heaven and earth.

But Ordinary Time is a time in which we focus on the *life* and *teachings* of Jesus (not his *birth*, not his *death*, not his *baptism* or *ascension*). The color for Ordinary Time is green, reflecting *growth* and *life*. Just as the trees and plants around us have turned green and are growing in this season, so *we* are meant to grow in discipleship, as we hear the stories of Christ's teachings and miracles. This is a time in which we grow in our capacity to follow Christ, and there is nothing *ordinary* about that!

God has ordered this world and our lives for our well-being. There is a rhythm that God has established, and one of the ways that we find that rhythm is in the seasons. In spring, plants grow and animals are born and crops are planted and the weather warms up and the world starts coming back to life. In summer, it is green and warm and the days are long. In the fall, it starts to cool off and trees and plants and animals begin the process of going dormant; the days begin to shorten and crops are harvested. In the winter, plants and trees have shed their leaves, animals are hibernating, the days are short, and the world *rests*. And then it starts all over again, this rhythm of life-death-new life that God has built into the order of creation.

If you planted your garden in the winter, what would happen? It wouldn't grow. You have to wait until the right *season*. But then, let's say you wait until spring to plant your garden. You can't harvest it in that *same season*. It needs time to take root and grow and develop. So you plant in one season, and then you harvest in another. If a woman conceived a child right now and delivered in the same season, the baby wouldn't survive. It needs time to grow and develop. If you walked into my house right now and saw it filled with Halloween decorations – pumpkins and skeletons and vampires and ghosts – it would be a little weird (and maybe a little uncomfortable) because it's not the right *season* for that. There is an *order* and a *rhythm* built into our lives, built into *creation* that helps us make sense out of life; helps things to take root and grow and develop in us and around us. There are particular things that have to happen in particular seasons.

Scripture talks about this, too, in our reading from Ecclesiastes. “For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven.” God gives us seasons (spring, summer, fall, winter) for different *purposes*; for different things to happen. There is one season in which things are *planted*, another season in which they *take root* and *grow*, another season in which they are *harvested*, and another season in which they *lie dormant* and *rest*.

In that same way, God gives us seasons in the life of the church – different *times* for different *things to happen* and be *appropriate*. There are seasons when we focus on the birth of Jesus and the coming of Christ. Seasons when we focus on the suffering and death of Jesus. Seasons when we focus on the Holy Spirit. And seasons in which we focus on the *teachings* of Jesus. We don't focus on them all at once, at the *same* time, so that they each have the time that they need to take root and grow in us.

Last week we talked about *chronos* time and *kairos* time. Chronos time deals with set dates, numbers, minutes, and hours. It is *chronological* time, the way that we are used to thinking about time (1:00, 2:00, 3:00, etc.). While kairos time deals more with “when the time feels right.” We said that human beings live mostly in *chronos* time, while God lives mostly in *kairos* time. And one of the challenges is for us to open ourselves up to that kairos understanding of time; to see things from God’s perspective. But I was very intentional about saying *mostly*. God lives *mostly* in kairos time. Because in the birth of Jesus Christ, God became one of us and *entered in to chronos time*. God entered into our minutes and hours and days and weeks and months and years and *seasons*. And God *uses* that time – God uses *our understanding of time* – to bring about God’s will for this world and for our lives and to help us grow in faith, in our ability to *trust* God and live life *with* God.

So the *world* around us has different seasons in which different things are appropriate. The *church* has different seasons in which different things are appropriate; different aspects of our faith take root and grow in us. And our *lives* have different seasons. There are different times in our lives in which different things are appropriate or suitable or necessary for us. There is a season in which we go to school and learn, a season in which we go out and work and put to use what we have learned, and a season in which we retire and enjoy the fruit of our labor. There are seasons in which parents care for their children – raise them and nurture them – seasons where parents send their children out into the world, and seasons in which *children* have to care for their *parents*. There are seasons of joy and happiness, when everything in our lives is going well, and there are seasons of sadness and struggle, when nothing seems to be going right. Seasons of health and seasons of sickness. We all experience seasons of *waiting*. And the thing is, each of these seasons can help us *grow*. There is something that we can *learn* from each of them.

Why this *matters*, the reason that we're *talking* about it today, is because knowing what season you are in helps you know how to *act*; how to *live* and relate to *God* and to *each other*. If you know that it's *winter*, you don't go outside in a bathing suit. If you know that it's *summer*, you don't go out in a coat and scarf and gloves. If you know that it's Lent or Good Friday, you don't go around singing Christmas songs, because it's not the right season. If you're 80 years old, you're not planning on having a child, because you know you're not in that season of your life. Ecclesiastes says that "God has made everything suitable for its time." God has ordered this world, ordered our lives, given it all a certain rhythm. And when we can live in those rhythms, we can better live in harmony with God and the world and with other people and with ourselves; we know our place in the story, and life is a little bit easier.

So let's say you have been hoping, praying, planning for something to happen in your life. I mean you really want it; you are really counting on it. A new job, a relationship, whatever...and it's just not happening. Maybe it's not time yet. Maybe it's not the right season in your life for that thing to happen. Maybe you're in a different season, where you need to focus on *this* thing first, so that it can take root and grow in you before this *other* thing can happen.

Or something is happening in your life that you totally weren't expecting. A pregnancy, a sickness (cancer), the loss of a job, or the loss of some physical or mental ability. Instead of despairing about it, what if you could view this as the season of your life where that thing is happening so that you can grow and learn something about yourself, about the world, about God, before you move on to this next thing.

When it rains in the spring/summer, that's not a *bad* thing. It's just something that happens so that the plants and crops can grow. When the trees die in fall/winter, that's not a *bad* thing. It's something that happens so that the trees can grow back the next year. If this thing is happening (or not happening) in your life, maybe there is something *in this* that can help you grow and prepare you for the *next* season in your life.

We have just been through a long season of pandemic. Of sickness and death and distancing and isolation. We are starting to emerge from that into a *new* season in the world and in our lives and in the church. And while it has been a very lonely, scary season of *loss* for a lot of people, there were also things that we *gained* from it. New technologies that help us connect with each other over distances. A slower pace of life for a lot of people. More time spent with those closest to us (or a newfound *appreciation* for the time we're able to spend with family and friends). Time spent cooking and reading and praying and walking that we hadn't been able to do before. There are things about this experience that we want to carry with us.

And so as we prepare to *leave* this season and enter into a *new* season in our lives, we need to be mindful of what we want to hold on to and intentional about holding on *to* it as we move forward. Maybe God can use this season in our lives to help us *grow* and *prepare us* for the season that is coming *next*. Let us pray...