

Commentary on the Gospel for Fri, Sep 26th 2014

So, a confession – I am a baby boomer, and thus came of age in the 60s. I cannot read this passage from Ecclesiastes without recalling the Pete Seeger song “Turn, Turn, Turn,” which became a top hit when covered by the "Byrds" in 1965. The melody runs through my head as I write this reflection.

“There is an appointed time for everything” – but what is “time?” There are so many phrases related to time and our obsessions with it:

- “Timing is everything.”
- “It’s not the right time.”
- “What time is it?” “I’m going to be late!”
- “Time to get up (or to go to bed).”
- “Time to settle down.”
- “All in good time.”
- “Right on time.”
- “In God’s good time.”
- “Does anybody really know what time it is? Does anybody really care, about time? If so, I can’t imagine why, we’ve all got time enough to cry.” (so, "Chicago," another musical group, was a musical influence also!)

Many of these and other phrases and concerns about time relate to ordering our lives, being part of a structured society in which time is a key component. Other societies have different attitudes toward time (think nomadic first peoples wandering the plains of North America in the 18th century, or the Saudi Arabian peninsula, or the Australian outback), less concerned with the time right now and more concerned with the seasons that governed their survival.

We have probably all heard someone referring to an athlete or a performer as “being in the zone” or “letting the game come to her.” These athletes will say things “slow down” and they are more aware of all the forces that come to bear on their performance. I suspect most of us have had times in our lives when things seem to be going very well. We feel good because we feel in control, that all components in our lives are coming together in balance.

I think one lesson from Ecclesiastes, though, is that we don’t control time, God does. God has made everything “appropriate to its time.” The author in Ecclesiastes expressed a spirituality of time that transcends our daily concerns with the mundane. There isn’t just a time to plant, or seek, or build, or laugh – there is an appropriate time for all things. God has set in motion the seasons of our lives and “put the timeless into [our] hearts.”

It is our task to discern whether the timing of what we face is “appropriate” in God’s grand creation. WE may think the time is right - to build, or to embrace, or to be silent, or to love - but what is God suggesting to us when we reflect more fully on what we are about to do? WE may feel this is the right time, but what does the quiet whisper of God tell us? WE may want to do something, and may be able to do so, but is it the appropriate time in God’s timeless call to us? And when our life draws to a close, WE may want to hold onto the many gifts of this wonderful creation, when God tells us the time is right to let them go.

Jesus admonishes His disciples at several points that “it is not his time,” or that the time was not right. Spiritual people have the great gift of awareness, of being able to challenge whether what they are doing in every moment is connected with God’s call to them. Time becomes not a clock measurement, a calendar entry, but an elemental oneness with the Creator. It seems to me that the author of Ecclesiastes was able to put aside our human restlessness and anxiety about the future and received the gift of peace, of knowing the true meaning of time as God intended it to be. I think the author understood what the “timeless” was in our hearts – a yearning to connect with God the Creator, our great lover, the one with whom we belong for all future “time.” I suspect the author was able to accept the ebbs and flows of life as gifts from God, with hidden treasures of meaning and importance, that could only be fully understood in the timeless gift of God’s love.

And so my prayer today is for the gift to discern, during every moment of every day, whether my response is consistent with God’s timing, so I can be guided by the timelessness of God’s love and thus “really know what time it is.”

Tom Purcell - Creighton's Heider College of Business