

An Invitation In Every Season

Sermon Preached by the Marlena Graves

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I would venture to say that Ecclesiastes chapter three is one of the more well-known chapters in Old Testament Wisdom Literature, aside from Psalm 23—if only because it sky rocketed to fame when the group, The Byrds, covered and released Pete Seeger’s single “Turn, Turn, Turn, (To Everything There is a Season)” in 1965.

To Everything (Turn, Turn, Turn)

There is a season (Turn, Turn, Turn)

And a time to every purpose, under Heaven

If you haven’t heard it (you’d be terribly horrified by my singing so I won’t attempt it now) you can look it up on Youtube or dig out your record player and records—of course, you might have to work hard to blow the accumulated dust off. Maybe part of the reason the song resonated with so many is because Ecclesiastes three simply and beautifully states what happens to be the case; life is made up of seasons.

What season are you in? It’s hard for me to tell by just standing up here and looking at you. Yet I know that for some of you it is a miracle that you are here. Your souls are young but your bodies are rebelling. Getting out of bed and out the door to church is miraculous—up there with the parting of the Red Sea. Sometimes you think that you’re not going to make it. You wish that your outward body would accurately reflect the young, fresh, youthful and enlivened soul that you are. You wonder if your life is worth much.... if the best is behind you. If people could but see who you are beyond your body. *Be assured my brother and sister—God knows where you are and he sees you. He is near to you. Salvation has come to your house today in this season.*

Others of you are busy with children—running here and there barely able to catch a breath, barely able to sit down for a good talk with your spouse or a good friend. While you deeply love your family, you sometimes wonder when the rat race will end. You are giving, giving, giving out of love, but sometimes you feel as if you are losing yourself, as if your life is slipping away. There are so many things you’d like to do, ministries you’d like to be involved in, but your family needs you. *Be assured my brother and sister—God knows where you are and he sees you. He is near to you. Salvation has come to your house today in this season.*

There are others of you who are lovely but oh so lonely. Maybe you are single having never married, maybe you lost a spouse or have gone through a divorce. You long to have a companion—someone with whom you can share your life with. You do give of yourself by volunteering in the community and here at the church. You do give of yourself, to your extended family and friends—but there is this gnawing loneliness within and without—you spend a lot of time by yourself. Sometimes you cry yourself to sleep at night or feel like it. Church is your sanctuary

but you can't take this beautiful communal experience home with you. People have their families, their lives, and you've been hung out to dry—or so you feel like it. *Be assured my brother and sister—God knows where you are and he sees you. He is near to you. Salvation has come to your house today in this season.*

Others of you here, you are young or young at heart and feel like you've got so much to give, so much to live for and explore. You long to use your gifts and be affirmed for the gifts you have. You don't have much to complain about. But sometimes you wonder about your place in the world, about your purpose. If you're to be honest, sometimes you even feel stuck—stuck like those who are going through the proverbial mid-life crisis except that you are decades younger. You are young and restless yet full-of-hope and longing to find your place in the world, longing to know and be known by those around you. Searching for life. *Be assured my brother and sister—God knows where you are and he sees you. He is near to you. Salvation has come to your house today in this season.*

Some of you are drowning in your sins... in yourself. You're hoping for deliverance or escape from the hell that you call your life. You're depressed, barely hanging on. Some people know about your condition but for the most part you keep it to yourself. You hear all this talk about the Christian life, about Jesus and eternal life yet you wonder, "Where's my deliverance? Where is the power of the gospel in my life?" I need forgiveness of sins, I am a slave to sin and need to overcome my addictions and neuroses, so I can just live a normal life—forget about overachieving. Yet, I don't feel like I can share who I am with these people around me. What would they think of me?" *Be assured my brother and sister—God knows where you are and he sees you. He is near to you. Confess this season of sin and you will be forgiven. Salvation has come to your house today in this season.*

For some of us, this is the best time of our lives. What we've worked hard for, what we've yearned for is coming to pass or soon will come to pass. We are rejoicing and want to share that goodness with those around us. After all, joy and goodness proliferate when they are shared don't they? Love and joy multiply like the loaves and the fish that Jesus and the apostles passed out to the great crowd. Some of us could use some that right now, so please pass the bread. *Be assured my brother and sister—God knows where you are and he sees you. He is near to you. Salvation has come to your house today in this season.*

There are some here who are here out of habit or because of family pressures or because it is what you grew up doing. Maybe you like the fellowship. Bob gives interesting sermons that move you while you are in your seat but not the rest of the week. Maybe the love of Jesus Christ in you has grown cold or maybe it was never there. Your body is present but you're a prodigal soul. Know that the Father's arms are always open to welcome you. We welcome you in the name of Jesus. May your prodigal soul come home. *Be assured my brother and sister—God knows where you are and he sees you. He is near to you. Salvation has come to your house today in this season.*

You see, I don't know where you are. But look around you, these are your brothers and sisters, mothers and fathers. God says to you and to me, "Everything...everything... I have...is

yours. I have given you everything you need for life and godliness (Check out 2 Peter chapter 1). Don't you know, my child, that my kingdom is a kingdom of justice or righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit (See Romans 4:17). Behold your family. Take a moment and look around. Behold...your family!

Young and old alike need to know where you are so they can learn how to love you and be Christ to you in whatever season of life you are in. How can we lay our lives down for one another no matter what season we are in if we really don't know one another or too much about one another?

You see it can't just be Bob and Jan or the elders and the deacons. We are all one body, in this life together, called to love one another and lay our lives down for one another. We are not called to the minimum that will just barely get us by. What kind of life does that produce in us and in our church and in our families or among us and our friends? When we lay our lives down for one another, with all God's energy that is at work within us, and to the best of our ability in whatever season we are in, the world will take notice. Captives will be set free. Those who mourn will be comforted through God working in and through us. We will rejoice with those who rejoice. Some of us need to learn how to rejoice in the light, to be glad in God because we've been in the darkness and gloom so long. We slowly learn that from being around one another. We slowly learn how to live joy-filled lives even in the mist of difficult and uncertain circumstances by hanging around other brothers and sisters in this community who do just that.

Some of us who haven't had it so bad need to learn compassion and how to mourn with others. It all comes from living our lives together. Sunday morning for two hours isn't enough. In our God-given community, we'll learn to confess our sins to one another and so... healing will begin. And as we do that, we will see just how God is making everything beautiful in its time if we haven't been able to see it before. Don't you know that the air quivers with God's presence and that the earth is dripping with the divine like honey dripping from the honeycomb? Go ahead, scoop that honey up and take a lick. You will taste and see that God is good. You will learn as the Taize Community sings from Romans 8:38 and 39, *Nothing can ever come between us and the love of God, the love of God revealed to us in Christ Jesus*. God wants to meet you and invite you and enfold you in no matter what season you are in (see the icon of invitation).

Do you remember the story in John 21? The disciples are in their boat, they are fishing. Maybe it was because they didn't know what else to do or because fisherman rhythms were the only comfort to be had after experiencing what they thought was their worst nightmare—Jesus' death on the cross. In the last few days all their hopes and dreams had gone down the drain or so they thought. It was in that setting that the God of the universe, the God who had suffered at the hands of the high priest and Romans soldiers, the God who suffered humiliation and unimaginable pain, the God who we killed, it was this God, the creator of the universe, it was this God, who knelt at the beach and stoked the coals so that the fish would cook just right. Perfectly tender and juicy fish. In his premeditated act of his beautiful and eternal hospitality, he cooked and served breakfast to the nearly physically, emotionally, and spiritually destroyed disciples. Peter in his enthusiasm jumped out of the boat and swam for his life. He swam for his life to Jesus. Are we swimming for our lives to Jesus?

This is the same God who bids to you to come and eat of his eternal life-bread no matter what season of life you are in. This is the God who says to those of you who are in pain, “It won’t always be this way, I am making all things new and everything beautiful in its time.” Do you not sense eternity in your hearts? He also says to you who are rejoicing and experiencing the good and learning that the kingdom of God is justice and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit (and by the way he wants all of us to learn what that means), he is saying to you, “You have seen and experienced nothing yet.” To all of us he says, “Enter into the joy of your father.”

He says these things to us through prayer and creation and Scripture. He says it to us through his body the church --both those living and those who have gone before. May we be a body that walks with one another and loves one another in all of our seasons. We weren’t made to experience these seasons alone but to experience them in the beloved community of Christ. You are the beloved community of Christ. And we were made to enfold *new members* into this beloved community of Christ. Now may you and I love one another like Jesus has loved us through all of our seasons and also spur one another on unto love and good works. Amen.