

## A TIME TO REMEMBER

**TEXT:** Ecclesiastes 3:1-9

In May of 2008, this congregation took a bold step. Despite some strong opposing views from the community, Hoquiam United Methodist Church voted to become a Reconciling Congregation. It was an historic moment in our conservative, rural community. Despite the negativity expressed in letters to the newspaper, the church members responded in love and acceptance of all persons, reaching out with the message of God's love, hope and compassion for all.

Yes, there were dissenters, but the bulk of the congregation responded by offering a safe place for all people to tell their story and live more authentically. They responded with love – pure love. And here we are, ten years later, still ministering to all of the community in the spirit of God's love and truth, one person at a time.

To be a Reconciling Congregation means that we, as a Church, explicitly welcome everyone, including all sexual orientations and gender identities, fully in the life of the church. We print this statement in our bulletin each Sunday. We include it in our church notices in the newspaper each week. We believe it. We honor it. We own it.

This morning I would like to have us listen to the very familiar words from Ecclesiastes 3, verses 1-9:

For everything there is a season and a time for every matter under heaven;  
A time to be born, and a time to die;  
A time to plant, and a time to pluck up what is planted;  
A time to kill, and a time to heal;  
A time to break down, and a time to build up;  
A time to weep, and a time to laugh;  
A time to mourn, and a time to dance;  
A time to throw away stones, and a time to gather stones together;  
A time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing;  
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 sew;  
A time to keep silence, and a time to speak;  
A time to love, and a time to hate;  
A time for struggle, and a time for peace.

What brings us today, to this time and to this place? On the surface, we might all answer differently. We would share our own experiences, tell our own stories. But what brings a small congregation to open its hearts, minds and doors to welcome those who have perhaps been rejected by their neighbors, or those who fear such rejection if they were to open themselves up to reveal their identity as “alphabet soup”? What would bring these rejected folks to this small congregation which has taken the bold step to proclaim God’s love for God’s entire creation?

For some there is the assurance of hope – of knowing that transformation is possible. For others there is the knowledge that in coming together there is strength – where two or more are gathered...

The writer of Ecclesiastes reminds us of the seasons. We hear the author talk about life’s balances. To everything there is a season and there is a time for every purpose, for every matter. In these verses is an acknowledgment of the planting and the harvest, of losing and finding, of holding on and of letting go. As we look back this morning, we are aware of the pain. This is something that is alive and well and living right inside us. We know very clearly what the writer was talking about with the words “mourning” and “struggling”. Perhaps if we think about watching the sun come up this morning, about listening to the birds calling to one another, about listening to the rhythm of the water, perhaps we can better understand the balance of this piece.

“Mourning” balances with “dancing”, “struggle” balances with “peace”.

Where did our energy, our courage, come from this morning that brought us to this place? Where did our energy and courage come from ten years ago when this body of Christ elected to follow Christ’s teaching to “love one another as I have loved you”? What keeps us going? What does it matter?

It matters because we are known by God. Each one of us. And more than knowing, God has searched us. That says to me that God has a definite investment. How much easier it would be to create us, and then just let go. But that's not what the psalmist believes. Instead, we heard that God has searched us, and knows us completely. The text says that God knows our actions, and God knows our hearts. Even to the psalmist it's too wonderful for humans to begin to comprehend. But in the end, we know that God loves each one of us, for we are all God's children and we all dwell in the heart of God.

These wonderful verses emphasize that everyone has a sense of purpose and destiny, but no matter what we look to in order to satisfy that need, only God can make it clear and fulfill it for us.

There's a line from a song that we did not sing, but most of us know that confronts and haunts me, "In the end is our beginning; in our time; infinity; in our doubt there is believing; in our life; eternity." Can we believe these words this morning? Are we able to let them dwell inside of us and become a balm to us this morning?

Now, with all due respect to Ecclesiastes 3, I feel that is one line missing that I would like to add: "There is a time to stay, and a time to leave." Ten years ago there were those who chose to leave and it was their right to do so. They followed what their conscience asked of them. But for those who chose to follow the Christ; for those who chose to welcome and embrace all of the beloved family of God; for those who chose to listen to the urging of the Holy Spirit, it was the time to stay and to embrace each other as members of Christ's community.

So our journey continues. I pray that we will always hear the God of time, the God of all our seasons. May we come to know God more deeply in our silences, as well as the times where we speak out. May we come to know God in our weeping and in our laughing, in our mourning and our dancing, in our being born and in our dying, in our gathering together and in our letting go.

May this church and its people continue to come forward to offer themselves for the work of justice, healing and faithfulness to which God calls us. In God's creation, God declared all, each and everyone, each and everything to be good. May we listen well and attend to what God called to be good this day, at this time. In this world of so many names, faces, places, spaces, may we remember that there is room enough, there is love enough for all, each and everyone, each and everything. Amen.