

TURN, TURN, TURN

TEXT: Ecclesiastes 3:1-13

Back in the late 1950s, popular folk singer Pete Seeger wrote a song called *Turn, Turn, Turn*. It became his signature piece and a very frequent musical selection for weddings and funerals. The Biblical text posits there being a time and place for all things: laughter and sorrow, healing and killing, war and peace. The lines are open to myriad interpretations, but Seeger's song presents them as a plea for world peace because of the closing line "a time for peace. I swear it's not too late."

This beautiful text from the book of Ecclesiastes reflects the many seasons of our lives. Pete Seeger reminds us of the importance of recognizing these times and the fact that we all go through a variety of seasons over the course of the years God gives us.

As we come up to another new year, I'd like to suggest that it is a time to step back and ask ourselves this question: *what season am I in?* God created us to flourish and benefit from living life with an understanding of the changing of seasons. In the agrarian culture Jesus grew up in, not understanding the seasons meant the difference between life and death. If the farmer didn't sow his seed at the right time he would waste his money and have no crop to feed his family or sell to pay his debts. In today's world, ignoring seasons might not be penalized with lack of food to eat, but it can take a great toll on the amount of peace we experience in life.

So I'd like for us to think about these things for a minute:

Are you in winter? This is a time when things slow down. Your soul gets the rest it needs. It's a season of quiet. It's a time to stop things, not to start things. A time to center your life around the people and values you cherish most.

Are you in spring? New dreams and ideas are born here. Even old dreams find resurrection power in coming to life. Excitement is in the air.

Are you in summer: Here is where you water and feed your soul. There is a lot of growth and lots of visible progress. It's hot, but it's fun!

Are you in fall? It's time to reap the benefits of resting in Winter, sowing in Spring and growing in Summer. It's fruitful and a time to give thanks for all that God has done.

The Bible tells us that there is a season and a time for every matter under the sun. If we can learn to partner with God through the seasons of life and allow those rhythms to guide us, we will live more fruitful, productive, peaceful lives. On the other hand, trying to force something out of season will not only cost you the benefits of the season you're in, but you'll also run the risk of botching an entire four-season cycle.

Van Vandergriff, Family Zone Pastor asks us: Do your current actions in life show you're a good meteorologist? In other words, are you aware of which season you're personally in? Do your plans, desires, dreams and expectations line up with the season God has given you to live in today? If not, what changes do you need to make today to bring your life into alignment? Here's the promise we have for living in alignment with the seasons: "Night and day, whether he sleeps or gets up, the seed sprouts and grows, though he does not know how" (Mark 4:27). All because his life is aligned with the seasons.

So today is New Year's Eve. Time to take stock of what season we are really in and to try to make some reasonable plans for the new year that's ahead. If you are like me, your New Year's Resolutions don't change much from year to year. Every year I resolve to take off some extra pounds, organize the reams of paper that sits in stacks around the computer, make a plan for systematic housekeeping. Well, good luck on all of those. They keep recurring year after year.

So today I'd like us to think a little differently about New Year's resolutions. Once, when the people of God had become careless in their relationship with Him, the Lord rebuked them through the prophet Haggai. "Consider your ways!", he declared, urging them to reflect on some of the things happening to them and to evaluate their slipshod spirituality in light of what God had told them.

Even those most faithful to God occasionally need to pause and think about the direction of their lives. It's so easy to bump along from one busy week to another without ever stopping to ponder where we're going and where we should be going.

The beginning of a new year is an ideal time to stop, look up and get our bearings. For starters, here are some questions to ask prayerfully in the presence of God as you "Consider your ways". I'm going to give you all 31 (yes, 31) questions because I want you to take these home and consider some of the ones that are more challenging to you at a time when you can ponder them in a quiet time when you don't feel rushed. You can think about them one each day, or try tackling them all at once. The value of many of these questions is not in their profundity, but in the simple fact that they bring an issue or commitment into focus. For example, just by articulating which person you most want to encourage this year, you will be more likely to remember to encourage that person than if you hadn't considered that question.

But today, I'm selecting just a few that I'd like us to consider together. These are questions that relate to your church and your relationship with it. I'd like for us to think about these questions from two viewpoints: One for each of us individually, and one from the viewpoint of the church collectively.

Questions: 6, 20, 28

In addition to Biblical doctrine, what Biblical event or story or person would you like to explore? I usually follow the lectionary in preaching. That's a great discipline, but it misses a lot of the Bible. This next year, I'd like to look at some of the "other stuff" in the Bible and I'd like to know what you'd like to hear.

Turn. Turn. Turn. As I wrote these words, I realized that each of you can and will identify with many of the words in this biblical passage. They are words and verbs that speak to the many and complex seasons of our lives. They are words that bind us by our common human experience. They are words that capture a truth that at times is hard to embrace. They are words that capture a truth that at times we eagerly await. They are words that perhaps frame much of the journey of human life.

One of the things I sometimes miss from my growing up in the Mid-west is the clear presence of nature's four seasons. They serve as a visual reminder of the more subtle seasons of our lives.

As we slog through the rainy winter and look forward to the lengthening of the days, I invite you to once again read this Ecclesiastes text. I pray whatever season you find yourself in, that it will bring you a sense of peace. May its imagery provide you with words for a journey shared with many.

If you would like a copy of the 31 Resolutions (Questions) please contact Pastor Kathryn.