

Scripture Readings and Sermon

January 6, 2019 by Rev. Mark Brechin

Commentary on Ecclesiastes 3:1-13

Ecclesiastes is traditionally associated with Solomon although most scholars reject this notion. The style and earliest fragments found which contain parts of Ecclesiastes point to either the time of the Babylonian exile or afterwards due to the Aramaic influence upon the Hebrew. In the context of the Old Testament canon, Ecclesiastes is appropriately placed with the Book of Proverbs and Job. Like Proverbs, the author of Ecclesiastes proclaims to be a seeker of Wisdom. The wisdom which is sought, however, is not practical wisdom but extensional questions of meaning. Where as Job places this question in the context of suffering, the author of Ecclesiastes finds that the question is the same in the midst of suffering and in the midst of indulgence. For the author of Ecclesiastes, all of human endeavor is vanity. While Buddhist teaching calls this vanity an illusion which humanity must ascend, Ecclesiastes sees a deeper purpose in God's plan. Like Job, while humanity may not be able to see God's purpose, it does not mean that there is no purpose. What Ecclesiastes rejects is the illusion that humanity is ultimately in control. Humanity may build and create but eventually those things with collapse and end. What lasts is our relationship with God.

Commentary on Colossians 3:12-17

Unlike other church communities, Paul did not visit the community at Colossae which may explain the brevity of the letter - only four chapters. Once an important trading community, Colossae was devastated by an earthquake in 60 A.D. While it is debated whether or not Paul is the author of the letter, it is definitely Paul's theology that is used to address "false" teachings within the community. The larger church will later use the Gospel teachings and Paul's letters to establish a correct or "orthodox" view of what it means to be a Christian. Those who's teaching fall outside this view will be called "heretics". One of the earliest heretical views which the early church faced was those who wanted to portray Jesus as a philosopher in the style of Plato. This view emphasized the "hidden" kingdom and the presence of divinity within those who had "true" understanding. This view minimized Jesus' suffering and Jesus' call to actively love our neighbors. Instead, the focus was on spiritual manifestations, angels, and mystical understandings. Paul urges the church in Colossae to be an active community of love clothed with acts of compassion and humility. The spiritual life cannot be separated from the physical life. Faith influences actions and actions impact our faith.

Commentary on Luke 2:41-52

This is the only passage in the Bible which mentions Jesus as a child. There is an early text called the "Infancy Gospel of Thomas" which portrays Jesus as a boy. The stories within this text, however, were rejected by the early church. These stories include Jesus making living animals out of mud and bringing a boy back to life after he accidentally knocked him off a roof. While these stories may point to Jesus as the Son of God, they add little to story of the Good News which Jesus proclaimed. So why include the story of Jesus as a boy at the Temple? Just as Jesus' baptism marked the beginning of his ministry, Jesus at the Temple marks the beginning of his age of accountability. When a boy is around the age of twelve, he goes through his Bar Mitzvah when he is ready to observe religious precepts and is eligible to take part in public worship. This ability to participate in public worship is reflected in Jesus' claiming the Temple as "my Father's house".

Sermon Summary (*Youtube [Sermon Video](#)*)

As we enter a new year, thoughts turn toward time and how that time has been used in the past

and what we will do with time in the future. The old saying is "timing is everything" but it is not just about the right time but being at the right place with the right tools to address the opportunities at hand. For Jesus, being at the Temple when he was at the age of Bar Mitzvah discussing deep theological issues was being at the right place, at the right time, and doing the right thing. When his parents question him, Jesus responds with a Greek phrase that can mean both being "in my father's house" or "about my father's business". Jesus was where he needed to be, doing what he needed to be doing, when he needed to be doing it.

Reflecting on the past, it is easy to identify moments when our timing was off or we were simply in the wrong place at the wrong time. Ecclesiastes remind us that there is a time for everything but the trick is figuring out when is the correct time. Looking forward to the coming year, how can we become better at getting our timing right. In Greek there are two words for time that the Bible uses - kairos and chronos/kronos. Chronos is the time one our clocks, phones, and calendars. Chronos is the linear measure of time but kairos is the "right" time or God's time. If kairos is "God's timing" then the only way to improve our time is to improve our ability to listen to God.

Paul tells the Colossians to put on the clothing of compassion and kindness. Paul urges them to let Christ's peace dwell in them. Like Jesus at the Temple, these are not two separate things but are one thing. When Christ dwells in us, we begin to act more Christ like. The love of Christ shines forth in our actions. Through the Holy Spirit, we are given the gift of discernment to know when to act and when to restrain from actions. Living in Kairos, "God's time", is the direct result of having Christ live in us through grace. We grow and nurture this relationship through prayer informed by scripture. As our prayer life deepens, we begin to have a greater sense of kairos. Like Jesus at the Temple, we begin to feel the Holy Spirit directing us to be where we needed to be, doing what we needed to be doing, when we needed to be doing it.