

**Ecclesiastes 3:1-13**

**Psalm 8**

**Revelation 21:1-6a**

**The time of our lives**

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There is a time for every matter under heaven – a time to be born and a time to die; a time to plant, to pluck up, to kill, to heal, to seek, to lose, a time to love, and a time to hate. These things – and many others – fill our time. The old philosopher who wrote Ecclesiastes got this right at least to the extent that he sought simply to describe the kinds of things which go on in the world.

But there is more at stake in our time than a simple inventory of what happens, as if that would give “permission” for all we do and experience. Our lives are not merely a matter of washes over us. We are agents in history – we decide and act. It is we who build and plant, kill and heal. But Ecclesiastes *describes* what we do, and gives us no direction as to precisely what time it now is. Is this the time for killing or for healing? Perhaps the answer seems obvious – to us here, at least. But a different answer is equally obvious to others in different times and places, whose sense for the time fills our news reports daily with accounts of actions taken according to different seasons and calendars.

While Ecclesiastes’ philosopher can tell us *what* we do, he cannot tell us what *to* do. For this, we appeal directly to God: God, show us the way. It’s not usually as explicit as this, nor even clearly religious. But every invasion and persecution, every bomb and expulsion, as much as every act of grace and mercy, appeals to the necessity, the timeliness, the divine (or ultimate) requirement that now we kill or heal, keep silent or speak, weep or laugh. We seek assurance or assure others that our actions are just and, so, that they are timely: now *is* the time for this to happen.

Our lives, then, are not merely subject to the many things happening around us. These events, and our responses to them, are claims and counterclaims to justice and rightness. Our enemies believe that they are right in their enmity, as we think we’re right in opposing them. If there were a God, God would see things their (*and* our) way.

How then do we tell what time it is? What can reconcile our conflicting discernments of the times? How do we know what to do?

A hint of an answer is given in today’s reading from Revelation. The city of Jerusalem – a work of human hands – descends now from heaven as a new city. It is crucial, however, that it is recognisable as the old city with its deep history of conflicting time-tellings, its persecutions and injustices and misjudgements. It is indeed healed, but the recognisability is crucial because it means all that history of Jerusalem’s errors of judgement about the time do not finally determine how things end.

It’s almost as if God does not bother to tell the time, but rather simply presumes that now is his own time: the time in which all things are claimed for God’s purposes and not for any of our conflicting intentions and cross-purposed calendars. We mark just this each week when we gather around the table and declare that our failure to receive the kingdom of God has become God’s means of calling us again to become that kingdom, as the body of Jesus broken *by* us is said to be broken *for* us. Jesus was broken because he seemed to us untimely, out of season, but the Eucharist is God’s own

telling of the time: your times, your healing and killings, mournings and laughter, made my own.

What does this mean for us, on the cusp of another new year, according to our calendar time? It means that we are free to read the times as best we can, to argue about them, to persuade, to invite, to act, to warn and to correct as best we can. It means that we are free to risk telling the time and to act according to what the season seems to require, to test what it means here and now to act justly, to love mercy and to walk humbly. It means that where, in the old year, we might have gotten the times wrong, the new year begins with grace and forgiveness.

We look forward to the year to come not with confidence that we know now what to do, what time it is, but in the hope that we will find it again to be God's own time, in which our time is continually made new

Lift up your hearts then, and give your thanks and praise to the God who comes to be the time of our lives.

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