

ECCLISASTES 3:1-8

For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven; a time to be born 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 for laughter; 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 war, and a time for peace.

PRAY, LISTEN, WAIT

Ecclesiastes 3:1-8

All things come to an end. We know that. It's not a mystery. Dealing with death is one of the greatest challenges a human being faces—not only with one's own demise, but with that of loved ones, friends and pets. Coping with death is a life skill that can be acquired only through experience. You can observe others go through it a hundred times, but until it actually lands on your own doorstep, its cost is only an

intellectual concept.

Over my lengthy career in pastoral counseling, I worked with numerous clients, usually in their twenties, who sought help to work through their first genuine encounter with the grief process. How rare to make it that far into your life journey and never experience a gut-wrenching loss! It's overwhelming. There is no running away as many of them had tried to do. For as we all know, grief that is buried will not remain in its crypt.

It's hard to let go. It's hard to accept the reality that what is lost is gone forever. Children cannot grasp finality. I recall a number of years ago at my deceased brother-in-law's internment over at Spring Grove, the puzzlement expressed by his young grandson after the casket had been sealed and lowered into the ground. He pulled on his mother's sleeve and asked in bewilderment, "But how is he going to get out?"

My own six year old grandson, Geordie, who is almost scary intelligent and observant, recently raised the mortality issue out of nowhere. He comes to Glendale after school on Wednesdays and has dinner with us before he goes home. My daughter-in-law from Pittsburgh had lost her 93 year old grandmother earlier in the week. When that event came up in conversation, Geordie proclaimed to us that he was never going to die.

Now I believe in being honest with children to a point because if you aren't truthful with them, somewhere down the line they will fact check you and then wonder if they can trust what you say. So I fact checked him and responded, "Oh, yes, you will. And so will I and so will "Yia Yia" (which is Grandmother in Greek)...and so will everybody." But Geordie insisted that death would not include him. It reminded me of the famous quip credited to Mark Twain who remarked, "Somehow, I thought that there would be an exception made in my case."

At this point, Yia Yia was getting uncomfortable with the conversation and was giving me a nonverbal to change the subject. She doesn't believe that Geordie is old enough yet to be exposed to the ugly realities of life. And I agree he doesn't need to watch the evening news—why make him a fearful person before he can handle current events that give the rest of us nightmares? But on the other hand, death is a reality that can crop up at any time...and while he is lucky to have three sets of grandparents due to divorces, we are all between our mid 70's and early 80's, and none of us will likely see him walk down the aisle either for his wedding or his graduation from college. And in my opinion, denying the fact of death can lead to consequences down the line. Suppressing awareness of its reality may therefore not be the best idea. I don't know.

What I do know is that *For everything there is a season and a time for everything under heaven.* So here we are with our building now sold and facing a major change as a congregation. Now the importance of the building has been downplayed by the folks at Presbytery reminding those churches considering a merger that a building is not a church. The church is a community of believers. Which is true. But at the same time, every worshipping community needs a place to gather. And over the years, that gathering place acquires a significant emotional attachment. It's the center of worship, of fellowship and lots of memories. It's your Sunday destination. Its importance is not to be dismissed! So when it's gone, there is going to be grief and anger; perhaps even despair. This is precisely what makes mergers difficult to achieve because everyone is both emotionally and functionally attached to their building and most would prefer to go down with the ship rather than change locations.

What I am trying to say is that over our life cycles, time and again we face crises when the seasons change and when what was is no longer and what is coming to be is not yet known. It is as natural as birth and death. It's painful. It's been coming for a long time. It's nobody's fault. We are not victims. There is simply a time and a season for everything. And I

believe God supports us in all of these changes. So we pray. We listen.
And we wait. You may not like the answer. But I promise you there will
be one.

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