

A Hospital Chapel Sermon from ECCLESIASTES 3:1-8
“Facing Grief with Divine Purpose, Presence and Hope”

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I. A SCRIPTURE - ECCLESIASTES 3:1-8

- 1 There is an appointed time for everything,
and a time for every affair under the heavens.
- 2 A time to be born, and a time to die;
a time to plant, and a time to uproot the plant.
- 3 A time to kill, and a time to heal;
A time to tear down, and a time to build.
- 4 A time to weep, and a time to laugh;
A time to mourn, and a time to dance.
- 5 A time to scatter stones, and a time to gather them;
A time to embrace, and a time to be far from embraces.
- 6 A time to seek, and a time to lose;
A time to keep, and a time to cast away.
- 7 A time to rend, and a time to sew
A time to be silent, and a time to speak.
- 8 A time to love, and a time to hate;
A time of war, and a time of peace.¹

¹ 1, NAB, ECCLESIASTES 3:1-8.

II. A PRAYER

Let us all come together before The Lord,
each in our own Tradition.

The Lord be with you!

And with your spirit.

Lift up your hearts!

We lift them up to The Lord.

Let us give thanks to The Lord our GOD!

It is right and just.²

Almighty and ever living GOD,

may Your Consolation be upon us, Your Servants,

In this Time of Grieving

Knowing that You are Ever Present

Among us Your People

To uplift us to Your Throne of Heavenly Grace.

AMEN.

FOR GOD IS LOVE. HE HAS MADE US IN HIS IMAGE. AND WE
LIVE TO LOVE GOD AND ONE ANOTHER.

² 2, Roman Missal, 3rd Edition, "Introductory Rite."

III. AN INTRODUCTION

My brothers and sisters, we gather here today to cherish, lift up and honor the personhoods and lives of loved ones who have left this world and have been called Home to GOD.

From our reading in The Book of ECCLESIASTES 3, we are reminded of 3 most basic questions: First, “What is the purpose of our lives?” Second, “Where is GOD in the seasons of our lives?” Third, “Why are we a people of hope?”

Perhaps the answers to all 3 questions rest in The Same Place, that because “GOD is Love,”³ and because He has made us in His Image,⁴ therefore we live to love GOD and one another.⁵

³ 1, NAB, I JOHN 4:8.

⁴ 1, NAB, GENESIS 2:26-27.

⁵ 1, NAB, MATTHEW 22:36-40.

IV. WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF OUR LIVES?

What is The Purpose of our lives? The Preacher⁶ in ECCLESIASTES 3 sees The Wisdom of GOD's hand marking off the seasons of our lives, "an appointed time for everything, and a time for every affair under the heavens." There is a set time for each of us to be born and to die, to plant and to uproot, to wound and to heal, to tear down and to build.⁷ In all these seasons of our lives, we celebrate today The Gift of GOD's Hand over us, even as we mourn the passing of our loved ones.

As we honor the times of our lives with our dearly departed, we celebrate the living of those times of joy and struggle in our hearts with them. And we grieve the earthly closing of those same times of our lives with them as well. The Preacher also says in ECCLESIASTES 3 that GOD "has made everything appropriate to its time, and has put The Timeless into our hearts."⁸ Why? That we may become aware of His Compassionate Presence and Care.

Many now prepare to celebrate The Passover of The LORD, confessing with Israel the new life of Divine deliverance from bondage by The Angel of The LORD. This is The Same Glory of The King of Creation Who led His People in the wilderness with a Pillar of Cloud by day and Fire by night,⁹ that placed Moses in the cleft of a rock, covered him with His Hand and proclaimed His Name, "...The LORD GOD, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth."¹⁰

⁶ The Preacher in ECCLESIASTES is held by some Bible commentaries to be King Solomon of ancient Israel, the son of King David.

⁷ 1, NAB, ECCLESIASTES 3:1-3.

⁸ 1, NAB, ECCLESIASTES 3:11.

⁹ 1, NAB, EXODUS 13:21-22.

¹⁰ 3, KJV, EXODUS 34:6.

In all these shared times of our lives, we may discern The Divine Purpose of our lives, “to glorify GOD and to enjoy Him for ever.”¹¹ The Way we are most aware of This Purpose now, even in the midst of mourning, is in the faces of these loved ones and the times of our lives that we have shared under The Covering of GOD’s Hand and led by The Glory of His Presence.

In The Purposes of our lives, we cherish our departed loved ones as with St. Francis of Assisi, “Lord, make us instruments of Your Peace.” So in the seasons of our lives, His Glory and Goodness guides us to displace hatred with love, injury with pardon, doubt with Faith, despair with Hope, darkness with Light and sadness with Joy.”¹²

FOR GOD IS LOVE. HE HAS MADE US IN HIS IMAGE. AND WE LIVE TO LOVE GOD AND ONE ANOTHER.

¹¹ 4, Westminster Shorter Catechism, Q/A 1.

¹² 5, St. Francis of Assisi, Prayer for Peace.

V. WHERE IS GOD IN THE SEASONS OF OUR LIVES?

Where is GOD in the seasons of our lives? The Preacher continues to mark off the contrasting times of our lives, being deeply aware of The Light of GOD shining upon us, both upon the highest mountains of our lives, and upon the deepest valleys as well. So there is a time, “to weep and to laugh, to mourn and to dance, to scatter and to gather, to embrace and to be alone, to seek and to lose, to keep and to cast away.”¹³

Many now prepare to celebrate Easter Sunday, confessing with The Apostles The Resurrection of CHRIST and The Light of New Life emerging from Darkness. So JESUS says to us in JOHN 8:12, “I AM The Light of the world. Whoever follows Me will not walk in Darkness, but will have The Light of Life!”¹⁴

The Preacher in ECCLESIASTES recognizes all these seasons, not as pointless and random, but as Providence and Design from our Loving Creator, for he calls them all a “Gift of GOD.” As St. Paul reminds us, we are Called to be living fields¹⁵ and Temples¹⁶ of The HOLY SPIRIT, that The Light of GOD’s Presence may shine forth in all the seasons of our lives.

As St. Francis of Assisi saw, our Divine Master grants that we live in His Presence. And as we are consoled, so we console. As we become understood, we understand. And as we are loved, so we love even more!¹⁷

FOR GOD IS LOVE. HE HAS MADE US IN HIS IMAGE. AND WE LIVE TO LOVE GOD AND ONE ANOTHER.

¹³ 1, NAB, ECCLESIASTES 3:4-6.

¹⁴ 1, NAB, JOHN 8:12.

¹⁵ 1, NAB, I CORINTHIANS 3:9.

¹⁶ 1, NAB, I CORINTHIANS 6:19-20.

¹⁷ 5, St. Francis of Assisi, Prayer for Peace.

VI. WHY ARE WE A PEOPLE OF HOPE?

Why are we people of Hope? Because even in the deepest valleys of the times of our lives, as well as on the peaks, we know that The Lord is our Eternal Shepherd, that He leads us in “The Paths of Righteousness for His Name’s Sake,” that He restores our souls, that He refreshes our spirits beside the Living Waters of His Mercy and that He brings us to places of Rest in His Pastures.¹⁸

The Preacher knew These Truths. He confesses in ECCLESIASTES 3, “I recognize that whatever GOD does will endure forever,” that He sets the times of our lives while covering us with His very Hand, that we may come to revere Him and so place our Hope in Him. For our Eternal Good Shepherd is The One Who “restores”¹⁹ our souls and crowns our lives with His Goodness and Mercy.²⁰

Yes, the seasons of our lives are marked by times to tear and make whole, to be silent and to speak, to turn away and to love, to struggle and to have peace.²¹ But even when we should walk through “The Valley of The Shadow of Darkness and even Death,” we shall not fear. Why? Because our Hope tells us to trust in “The Rod and Staff” of our Lord, Who gives us Courage, Comfort, Strength and Healing.²²

The new Pope Francis I reminds us of why we are people of Hope, for we share the times of our lives to “walk together, take care of one another... and pray” for one another! For in all the seasons of our lives, we may take hold of “The Light of Hope” and live to “bring Hope to others..., to protect...” one another, “to look upon” others - and ourselves - with The same Divine “Tenderness and Love” within The “Horizon of Hope” that GOD has for us!²³

¹⁸ 1&3, NAB & KJV, PSALM 23:1-3.

¹⁹ 1, NAB, ECCLESIASTES 3:14-15.

²⁰ 3, KJV, PSALM 23:4-6.

²¹ 1, NAB, ECCLESIASTES 3:7-8.

²² 1&3, NAB & KJV, PSALM 23:4.

²³ 6, Pope Francis I, excerpts from Inaugural Mass, 3/19/2013.

As St. Francis of Assisi saw, “it is in giving that we receive. It is in pardoning that we are pardoned. And it is in dying unto self, O Lord, that we are reborn to Eternal Life” in You! ²⁴

We are people of Hope because we know, in loving and being loved by our dear ones who have gone Home to GOD - and those that remain with us - that The Lord is He Who spreads The Table of our lives before us. He anoints our very heads with The Oil of His Compassion. ²⁵ He feeds us The Bread of Life ²⁶ and overflows The Cup of Salvation for us. ²⁷ We live, through our tears of both joy and sorrow, under The Goodness and Mercy of our Redeemer, that we may dwell together in His House forever!” ²⁸

FOR GOD IS LOVE. HE HAS MADE US IN HIS IMAGE. AND WE LIVE TO LOVE GOD AND ONE ANOTHER.

²⁴ 5, St. Francis of Assisi, Prayer for Peace.

²⁵ 1 & 3, NAB & KJV, PSALM 23:5.

²⁶ 1&3, NAB & KJV, JOHN 6:35.

²⁷ 3, KJV, PSALM 116:13.

²⁸ 1&3, NAB & KJV, PSALM 23:6.

VII. IN CONCLUSION

My brothers and sisters, we have gathered to cherish, lift up and honor the eternal personhoods and lives of loved ones who have left this world and have been called Home to GOD. From ECCLESIASTES 3, we asked 3 most basic questions of life: First, “What is the purpose of our lives?” Second, “Where is GOD in the seasons of our lives?” Third, “Why are we a people of hope?”

We have answered that we shall ever keep in our hearts the eternal affection we have for our departed loved ones, and their eternal affection for us, safe in The Hand of The Lord. This is why we are able, with all certainty, to answer all 3 of these questions with The Same sure Answer: For “GOD is Love.”²⁹ He has made us in His Image.³⁰ And we live to love GOD and one another!³¹ AMEN.

²⁹ 1, NAB, I JOHN 4:8.

³⁰ 1, NAB, GENESIS 2:26-27.

³¹ 1, NAB, MATTHEW 22:36-40.

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