



February 27, 2022 Raquette Lake Chapel Sunday Blast

Three Key “Wisdom” Verses in Ecclesiastes Chapter 3

(3:1) There is an appointed time for everything, and a time for every affair under the heavens.

(3:9-11) What profit have workers from their toil? I have seen the business that God has given to mortals to be busied about. God has made everything appropriate to its time, but has put the timeless into their hearts so they cannot find out, from beginning to end, the work which God has done.

(3:16) ... under the sun in the judgment place I saw wickedness, and wickedness also in the seat of justice.

***Any one of these three verses could be the basis for a sermon on Biblical Wisdom!**

“There is an appointed time for everything” (3:1-8) The first eight verses are a poem about the repeated cycles of human experience. Each event occurs at its proper time in the scheme of things, and time appears to be orderly. And that’s a comforting thing! These verses have a message which has appealed to people for thousands of years. Many of us remember the popular song “Turn, Turn, Turn” whose lyrics are a direct copy from Ecclesiastes. People often turn to this passage for calm and a sense of order when they find the pace of life too hectic. It’s a reminder to slow down; go with the flow in the divine order of things.



“I have seen the business that God has given...” (3:9-15) Verse 9 is a little shocking: it echos the very beginning of Ecclesiastes (“All things are vanity.”) Having just read that there is a divine order in the world, verse 9 seems like Qoheleth is back-tracking, “Forget everything I just said. Life is pointless.” But let’s not jump to conclusions. Qoheleth observes that it is God who has determined the way the world works and has arranged our place and the work that we need to do. The remaining verses in this section make several assertions: (1) God seems to have a plan for everyone (“the business God has given to mortals”); (2) the best thing we can do is enjoy our work (life may not be all vanity!); (3) God and God’s power will never end.

“I saw wickedness ... in the seat of justice.” (3:16-22) We experience another sudden change in direction. While time may be ordered and every person has a God-given place in creation (which humans may not fully understand), there are unanswered questions about the problem of corrupt justice and oppression of the helpless. Do we agree with Qoheleth’s reason for this is that humans are no different from animals? (After all animals and humans “to the dust they both return.”) Throughout Ecclesiastes Qoheleth urges readers to accept what comes in life, whether planned for not. But don’t adopt an emotionlessness, stoic attitude and don’t go through life looking for joy everywhere! The Wisdom in chapter 3? Those verses at the top of the page call for careful reflection.

Special prayers this week: for Jim and his family dealing with a serious medical condition; friends of our virtual community who are fighting cancer; peace in the Ukraine and safety for the Craig family in Russia; safety for all first responders; healing for those suffering in the pandemic. Hear our prayers O Lord!
