

## Sermon Archive 207

Sunday 8 July, 2018

Knox Church, Christchurch

A series of readings, reflections and hymns, with Sumner Silver Band

Preacher: Rev. Dr Matthew Jack



**Reading:** Ecclesiastes 3: 1-8

**Reflection:** A time for moving forward?

It's sometimes a bit tricky, isn't it, knowing what to do with the current moment - how to respond to the current event. Is this a time to speak up, or to bite your tongue? Is this a time to listen and think some more, or time to make a stand? It's easy to get it wrong.

I've already told the story, at a Knox Café, of something that happened to me on a holiday in New Caledonia. I was on something called the chou chour train - a series of little open-air wagons towed behind a tractor. At the start of the tour, the tour guide said "as we go along, wave to the locals. They're friendly and they'll wave back". And they did. As we drove along we waved, they waved back. It was friendly and there were lots of smiles.

About ten minutes into the tour, a boy, looking about fourteen years old, seemingly became bored with waves and smiles. He started to wave like someone who had cerebral palsy - and giggling to his little brother in between. Remembering various friends of mine who have lived with cerebral palsy, and who have had to meet many hours with courage and strength, I thought the boys' waving and giggling very poor taste. Surely his parents would too, and tell him to stop it.

As his behaviour continued, and no adult intervention occurred, I found myself becoming angry. Is this a time to hold back, or a time to move forward?

-ooOoo-

The other day I found myself sitting at a lunch table with a group of people I know quite well. It would seem that they don't know me as well as I thought they did. One of them was relaying an amusing story of how, some time back in the 1970s,

he found himself in conversation with a friendly, animated stranger, whom, if he didn't know better, was almost flirting. That didn't make sense, since he, the flirter, was a man. Men don't flirt with men. That would be quote / unquote "homosexual". Debriefing from his experience, to a friend, the story teller was told "well, what did you expect, wearing a pink cardigan". To the laughter of the people at the lunch table, he said "well I took that cardigan down to the op shop and left it there".

As the laughter died down, I found myself wondering about what kind of moment it was. Was this a moment to hold back, or a time to move forward? It's easy to get these things wrong. For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven: we seek wisdom, for getting it right. We seek moment for finding God's way.

**Hymn:** Forth in your name, O Lord, I go,

**Reading:** Luke 13: 6-9

**Reflection:** A time for holding back

The tree is utterly useless; it bears no fruit. Maybe it provides shade. Maybe it provides a place for birds to live. Maybe it offers boughs for children to climb on. But I'm focussed on fruit, and it has none. So this is the time to get on in there and rip it out. This is the time to free up the soil. Focussed sharply on fruit, on harvest, I know that this is the time.

The gardener says to me "this is **not** the time". Calm down. Hold back. Let me do some nurturing, and we'll see how it goes.

I ponder these words. Had I rushed in, the tree would by now be dead. It'd be gone. Mercy has intervened - not so that nothing can happen instead - but so that nurturing can happen instead. In times when we are called to hold back - hold back from the judgment, from the execution of the sentence - the God figure calls us not to do nothing - but to be mercy, to be nurture, to be workers for a richer future in which the growth eventually comes - or we go climbing the tree instead!

Should the world go mad, and go to war, and should I be called upon to take up a gun, to get out there and rip out the tree, I would probably decline the invitation. I would probably ponder what does this time require? What kind of season is this? Is this a time for war - because apparently there is a time for war. If I decided that it was not this kind of time, not a time for war, I would have no excuse to do nothing. The gardener would challenge me to make it a time for

nurturing, for feeding, for working for a better time in which growth may come. A time to plant. A time to build up. A time to seek. A time to keep.

It's easy to get these things wrong. For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven: we seek wisdom, for getting it right. We seek moment for finding God's way.

**Hymn:** Dear God, embracing humankind

**Reading:** John 2: 13-17

**Reflection:** A time for breaking down

They described it as "zeal" - that sudden conviction that this house needed pulling down. It was obviously corrupt. It was obviously wrong. It needed to come down. It was, for him anyway, not one of those moments when discernment required delicacy. The task was clear.

For the youth wing of the African National Congress in South Africa, it was clear that the house of apartheid needed to come down. It needed strong resistance, direct, unapologetic smashing up.

In 1950, the Programme of Action commenced. Strikes, boycotts, civil disobedience, demonstrations. By the 1970s, there was the Soweto Uprising. Getting on board were the unions, the church, governments of various sporting nations, one time purchasers of South African sherry. Direct, clear, unflinching resistance - and proclaiming why. This house is wrong. It is to come down.

For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven: sometimes it's not just seeking wisdom. It's seeking courage. It's seeking proclamation of the truth. It's knowing that this is the moment to insist on justice.

**Hymn:** Sing a song for peace and justice,

**Reading:** Psalm 40: 1-3

**Reflection:** A time for building up

Following the fall of the house, Desmond Tutu wondered "what now?" What kind of time is this? And in the wondering, came the slow conviction that this was a time for building up, for listening to the cry, for drawing people up from the miry bog - and finding a good solid rock upon which to stand. It was a time to create new community, new human solidarity, through truth and reconciliation. People had to learn how to tell their story. People had to learn

how to listen to the other narrative. And that would take time. A law may be changed with the marking of a pen - but hearts, attitudes, need time to heal. So this is a time for patience, for gathering stones together, that long have stood apart. It was a time for sewing together what had been torn asunder. It was a time to keep silence, while truth was carefully spoken.

Let's take that people from the desolate pit, build them up, and give them a new song to sing.

It's easy to get these things wrong. For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven: we seek wisdom, for getting it right. We seek moment for finding God's way.

**Hymn:** Such perfect love my Shepherd shows

**Reading:** Mark 4: 26-28

**Reflection:** Beyond and throughout the seasons . . .

It's easy to get these things wrong. For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven: we seek wisdom, for getting it right. In the seeking, we can get anxious. Is this the right thing to do? Is this the moment for that response? Do we actually have the capacity to drive this train? Am I fit for this - wise enough, aware enough, brave enough? Good God, I hope the world isn't abandoned to my hands!

Peace! Hush! The kingdom is like a seed that has been planted. We rise, we sleep, we come, we go, we toil, we fall - and the seed keeps growing. We know not how - but the seed keeps growing.

For everything there is a season, and a time for every purpose under heaven. We're called to be wise, to discern what manner of time this is. But we are not called to anxiety. The seed, we know not how, is growing.

A time for moving forward; a time for holding back. A time for taking charge; a time for being quiet and listening. A time for building up, a time for healing. And through it all - as we get it right, and get it wrong - a seed is growing.

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