

Sermon: Spokane Friends Church – July 28, 2024
'Time Travel'
Ruthie Tippin, Morning Minister
Ecclesiastes, Chapter 3

Moving through time can be incredibly disorienting. Jon and I flew out of Dublin, Ireland at noon on Friday, July 19 – just nine days ago – and arrived in Seattle by 5:30 pm *on the same day*. Now *that* was an incredibly fast trip! Actually, what looked like a 5.5 hour trip on paper actually took 13.5 hours. I left my watch on “Dublin Time” and when we landed in Seattle, it was 1:30 in the morning in Dublin. By the time we got our luggage, went through customs, found our car, and drove home to Kalama it was almost 5:00 in the morning on Saturday. The clocks at our house told us it was really (*really?*) 10:00 pm.

Before cell phones that ‘self-correct’ and keep us straightened out when we crossed time zones, it was easy to lose track of time. And, regardless of what the clock says, our bodies have their own time markers – a ‘circadian rhythm’ that resets itself – given enough rest and time to recover. For every hour of sleep we lose, we need a day to regain our rhythm. It took Jon and me about eight days before the world seemed to spin in its orbit the right way again! To watch the Olympics ‘live’ you have to start when *they* start – *on time* – nine hours earlier than the time posted in Paris.

Time keeps on slippin', slippin', slippin' into the future
Time keeps on slippin', slippin', slippin' into the future

I want to fly like an eagle to the sea, Fly like an eagle let my spirit carry me.
I want to fly like an eagle 'til I'm free, Oh, Lord through the revolution.

Feed the babies who don't have enough to eat,
Shoe the children with no shoes on their feet,
House the people livin' in the street,
Oh, oh there's a solution.

I want to fly like an eagle 'til I'm free, right *through* the revolution.
Time keeps on slippin', slippin', slippin' into the future...

It's an old song, but the Steve Miller Band still has something to teach us about time. Time is slippery... we can't hold on to it. It's always moving – forward. I love the double entendre I see in the lyric about revolutions... the world is in

constant revolution on its axis, spinning, moving through space, and the *second* revolution so many have been concerned about since time began, that Christ spoke of in Matthew 25 – to feed the hungry, visit the imprisoned, clothe the naked. Will we keep moving forward toward a solution?

God is a mystery. Before all time, beyond all time, within all time. How can we imagine, or explain such a mystery? How can humankind, whose lives are limited, understand the mystery of a limitless God? One of the prophets who speaks in Ecclesiastes 3 has this to say in verses 9 to 15.

Verses 9-11: 9 What gain have the workers [the ones who act] from their toil? 10 I have seen the business that God has given to everyone to be busy with. 11 God has made everything suitable for its time; moreover God has put a sense of past and future into their minds, yet they cannot find out what God has done from the beginning to the end.

Interesting, isn't it? God has given us work to do - things 'suitable' for our time. We remember yesterday, live today, and plan for tomorrow. But God has also given us a sense of wonder about *all* time... the beginning of time to the end of time; eternity. We live in the moment, *and* we live in eternity, all at once.

Verses 12 & 13: I know that there is nothing better for them than to be happy and enjoy themselves as long as they live; moreover, it is God's gift that all should eat and drink and take pleasure in all their toil.

The prophet assures us that even though our lives are limited in time, it's God's intention and gift for us to enjoy our work and our lives while we have them.

Verse 14: I know that whatever God does endures forever; nothing can be added to it, nor anything taken from it; God has done this, so that all should stand in awe before him.

What God does and who God is lasts forever. God is timeless. Unlike humankind, God is not bound by time. God endures, and all that God does endures, and we are meant to respect and honor God in that.

Verse: 15 That which is, already has been; that which is to be, already is; and God seeks out what has gone by.

Here is the mystery... God holds *all* of time. "There is nothing new under the sun." It's remarkable! What has gone by? God knows and will take care of – seek out. Anything unfinished, incomplete, that God intends will be sought out and made complete. Time does not run out, for God endures forever.

There are many times when we may have wanted time to stand still... a perfect day, a lovely moment, an impending loss that seems too difficult to bear. There are other instances when we wish time would speed by as quickly as possible... waiting for a loved one to return home, a child soon expected to be born, a pending job offer. There are times when we can't figure out what time or day it is... for at least two days after arriving on the Isle of Man at the beginning of our trip this month, I kept asking Jon what day it was. There are times we can't forget – the assassination of John F. Kennedy, 9/11, the Covid pandemic. And there are times we often *refuse* to forget and hold tightly – family quarrels, political divisions, and even worse. Our world both suffers and thrives because of these, all in the span of human lifetimes.

The prophet has told us that 'for everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven.' If this is true, we must rely on the mystery of God who is beyond knowing, rather than on our own understanding. We must trust in the march of time, in the change of seasons for our lives and the lives of others, regardless of what 'time' it is. We must learn from the teachings of Jesus about how to live fruitful, meaningful lives. And we are required to be responsible for our lives as God has asked us to – to act justly, to love mercy, and to walk with God in humility.

May the words of this poet, written over 300 years ago [and drawn from Psalm 90, be our prayer for this hour, this day, this time...

O God, our Help in ages past, our Hope for years to come,
our Shelter from the stormy blast, and our eternal Home.

Before the hills in order stood, or earth received its frame,
from everlasting Thou art God, to endless years the same.

A thousand ages in Thy sight are like an evening gone,
short as the watch that ends the night before the rising sun.

5 Time, like an ever-rolling stream bears all of us away;
we fly forgotten, as a dream dies at the op'ning day.

6 O God, our Help in ages past, our Hope for years to come,
be Thou our Guard while life shall last, and our eternal Home!

Isaac Watts, 1719