

Spokane Friends Church – January 18, 2026

Sermon Title: “Look Both Ways”

Scripture: Ecclesiastes 3:1-8 and

Ecclesiastes 3:9-13 NRSV

<https://www.britannica.com/topic/Janus-Roman-god>



"To everything there is a season, and a time for every purpose under the heaven.

A time to be born and a time to die; a time to sow and a time to

A time to kill and a time to heal; a time to tear down and a time to build up;

A time to weep and a time to laugh; a time to mourn and a time to dance;

A time to cast away stones and a time to gather stones together;

a time to embrace and a time to refrain from embracing;

A time to gain and a time to lose; a time to keep and a time to cast away;

A time to rend 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 of war and a time of peace.

The Byrds made that a hit single, ‘Turn, Turn, Turn’, in 1965 and taught an entire generation of people what the Teacher in Ecclesiastes wanted us all to know... there is a time for every purpose under heaven. What time is it *now*? What day is it? What are we waking up to today?

When Jon and I lived in Iowa City, Iowa we celebrated New Years Eve in the delightful company of Quakers... two groups of Quakers who loved each other dearly - West Branch Friends Church and West Branch Friends Meeting. Their meetinghouses were just blocks from each other, and they had a rich history together – but I don’t have time to share that now. Each New Year’s Eve we would gather at the Friends Meeting with a smorgasbord of snacks and treats, games to play, and lots of friends together to await the new year. Just about 9:00 or 9:30 someone would say, “I think it’s getting close to Quaker Midnight!” And sure enough, within a few *minutes* everyone agreed it was time to celebrate with a great ‘Hurrah! Happy New Year!’ and head for home!

How do you celebrate a new season of your life? How do you usher in a new day? A New Year? What does it mean for you when December becomes January, when the end of one year becomes the beginning of another? It’s very common for us all to think of our New Year’s Resolutions, determining what we’ll add or eliminate from our lives or behaviors in the coming year. Ah, such good intentions! In many Christian traditions,

Watchnight Services are held late on New Year's Eve where people gather to look both ways - reviewing the past year, making confessions - and then prepare for the new year ahead with prayer.

"Early Quakers", quoting Britain's Faith and Practice of Friends, "held a testimony against the 'keeping of times and seasons'." They believed that all of life was sacramental, and that each day was holy. December 31<sup>st</sup> was just as full of God as January 1<sup>st</sup>. Since all time was holy, no time or day should be marked out as *more* holy or celebrated differently than any other. What God has done for us should always be remembered, and not celebrated differently on special occasions like Christmas, Easter, etc. This testimony has long since left our practice – most all Friends celebrate Christmas, Easter, and the New Year now, but the truth of that original testimony still stands. As the writer says in Faith and Practice, "we should remember and celebrate the work of God in us and for us *whenever* God, by the Spirit, calls us to this remembrance and this joy."

Many of you know that the Early Friends calendar was very different than the one you and I use today. It was marked as First Month, Second Month, etc. There was no acknowledgement of Mars, the god of war, for March, or Julius Caesar in July, or Augustus in August. Instead they were named 3<sup>rd</sup> month, 7<sup>th</sup> month, 8<sup>th</sup> month, and the days of each month were numbered as they are now. But names of the *days* were numbered as well. So, today would have been Sunday, January 18<sup>th</sup> for the Church of England in London, and 1<sup>st</sup> Day, 1<sup>st</sup> month, 18<sup>th</sup> day in the Quaker meetinghouse in Spokane.

Why January? Here's what I found: It's all because of Janus, the Roman god worshipped even before the founding of the city of Rome. Janus was called on for help and support well before any other gods were known or named. His name means 'door' or 'gateway', and he has two faces, each looking in opposite directions. There are many *jani* or ceremonial gateways in Rome and it was thought that Janus could see all things passing through, both coming and going. Our calendar marks the first month of the new year with January as the time of turning or swinging from the old year into the new year ahead.

Years ago, I wrote a song about doors. I had been trying to figure out what was next in my life. The boys had outgrown mom as a "Room Mother" at school. I had outgrown housekeeping! It was time to go back to work, but I wanted to do something new – certainly not teaching again! So I took a class about Second Career Choices. All those

inventory tests told me to be a mortician... until I checked the math scores again! Then, it said I should be a teacher!!! (NOT a math teacher!) I wrote this song not long after that. Here's what it said:

Look through your window – rub on the glass,  
Make sure you clearly see.  
Wonder is waiting just outside – waiting for you and for me.  
Open one door and close another,  
Don't be afraid to turn the key.  
What you will find is a wonderful assortment  
Of places to grow and be.

Perhaps that's what January is all about... what *each* day, according to early Friends meant. Opening a door to something new, to promise, to something unexpected, or perhaps... to the same old thing. But moving through a doorway *knowing* that each new day, each new month, each new year is sacred, holy, and held for us by God's Spirit.

What lies ahead? Much of that depends on us. Do we make time, *use* time, to thoughtfully, *deeply*, consider this? What choices will we make? What keys will we use? What next steps will we take in this sacred time we're given? What lessons will we have learned about ourselves from the past? What strengths will we bring forward into this new day? What will we remember to forget?

So often, we want to do what we want to do, regardless of what day it is, what time it is, and what's best for us. We ignore the lessons of the Teacher in Ecclesiastes. We want to keep, when we should cast away. We want to keep building when we should tear down. We want so badly to hold on sometimes, when we should – let go. It's hard to govern our lives as the Teacher marks them out. It's hard to *wait* for God to respond and *act* on our calendar and schedules.

But hear this, as the Teacher moves on in this same passage:

<sup>10</sup> I have seen the business that God has given to everyone to be busy with. <sup>11</sup> 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.

Do you *see* this? Do you see this with the ears of your heart?

God has given each one of us business to be *busy* doing. It may be personal. It may be corporate. But God has something for all of us to do.

*Everything* is suitable for *its* time. The timing may not be so great for *us*, but it's right and suitable for its *own* appointed time.

Beyond that, God has given *us* a sense of time – of the past and future. We know the difference between what has been and what is yet to be; what we've experienced and what we look forward to. What we have suffered and what we long for.

*But* God has reserved God's *own* sense of time as well - from the beginning to the end. God's view of time is much more inclusive than ours. God's understanding of time includes our own experience but that of *all* time and eternity as well.

"<sup>12</sup> I know that there is nothing better for them", says the Teacher, "than to be happy and enjoy themselves as long as they live; <sup>13</sup> moreover, it is God's gift that all should eat and drink and take pleasure in all their toil."

Regardless of what toil we are given to do, what responsibilities we have, what work is laid out for us, the Teacher instructs us to nurture ourselves with food and drink AND to find pleasure in what we're given to do. That's not always easy. Math was not easy for me, and it never will be. But, when I took Beginning Algebra in 9<sup>th</sup> grade, it *was* pleasurable! Thank you, Mr. Norton! Look for those times, those people who make your work easier, lighter, even interesting! And then, do and be the same for others.

This past year has brought much joy and sorrow. The new year has certainly begun with the same rhythm. What are we to do? We must remember that we do not hold the earth on its axis - God does. There are certain things God has control over, and there are certain things God has given *us* to do. We *must* do them.

Perhaps the rubric of the Teacher in Ecclesiastes is a good place to start. Let us think critically about our choices. Let us think deeply, and soberly. Let us thresh out our differences with others as if Christ were standing in our midst. Let us listen more and speak less. Let us stand up and speak out when it is *necessary* for the care and provision of others who are hurting. Let us not be silent, even as we treasure silence. Let us be aware of the swing of the door, as each day becomes the next, and times and seasons give us opportunity for every purpose God has, for each and all of us under heaven.

Amen.