

“Owner of Time,” Ecclesiastes 3:1-13, 1/6/2008, Albany UMC

According to the church calendar, today we are supposed to read different texts because the first Sunday of the Year is Epiphany Sunday. The word, “Epiphany,” means 'appearance.' So Epiphany is the season in which we celebrate the manifestation of Christ to the world. In the Western church, Epiphany is the end of Christmas celebration which started on Christmas day. But in the Eastern Church, Epiphany is their version of Christmas because they use a different Calendar (the Julian calendar) as we do (Gregorian calendar).

On this Epiphany Sunday, however, I wanted us to focus on this theme of the New Year, the theme of time.

The Bible has 66 books in it. Out of these 66 books, some are very familiar to us. But some are not so familiar and people don't even remember their names. And we don't get to hear those books read in worship.

I think Ecclesiastes is one of those books that are not familiar to us in the Bible. Every time I read this book, I have to double check if I get the name right.

But this book gives us the most profound, timeless, messages that we need to hear. Especially this very first Sunday of the Year, I thought, what this book says is very appropriate for us to keep in our minds. It says: there is time in our lives. A time to laugh, a time to weep; a time to mourn, and a time to dance; a time to plant, a time to harvest; a time for birth; a time for death.

The bottom line is we do not control our time. We do not have authority over our time. We cannot create or change our time. There is one who does all these: that is God our creator-- the one who has made heaven and earth; the one who has made things in the universe; the one who has made you and me.

If you read through the book, you will hear the clear message: it says, “Vanity of vanities! All is vanity.”

Money is important. Health is important. Job is important. Family is important. That is why we go to school. We dream. We get degrees. We get married. We get jobs. We work hard. We invest. We do this and that.

But the book says, “All the things we do are like striving after wind; life is just nothing... He who loves money will not be satisfied with money, nor he who loves abundance with its income. This too is vanity,” it says.

Then what do we do? Do we give up on what we do? Does the Bible tell us to quit? What?

No. What the Bible is telling us is clear: Fear your God. Love your God. Remember your Creator! The conclusion of the book is this: Fear God and keep His commandment because this is what God wants you to do.

The wise person is one who learns what God says. Such a person finds life, not just a life but an abundant life. But the fool is one who refuses to learn and the words of God and acts contrary to them. Such a fool finds only death.

I went to a funeral on Friday evening. A respected Korean retired minister died at the age of 75. I knew the man well. He was a good man who once in a while called me to see if I was doing ok. He earned a doctorate in theology and served churches and taught at seminaries. But he died. He died too young.

The church was packed with people. Many people came from a far distance to pay their respect to this man of God. I was travelling San Diego too but changed my plan and came back to attend the service.

Once again I realized how short life is. Once again I realized that we are just creatures who have to go once our names are called by the owner of our lives.

There is, says our text, even a proper time to die. We age as we increase in years, although none of us likes it. The time goes on and the unavoidable fact is that eventually we all face our death. "So teach us to number our days," sings the Psalmist, "that we may get a heart of wisdom" (Psalm 90:12).

The book says, "It is better to go to a house of mourning than to go to a house of feasting. Because that is the end of every man, and the living takes it to their hearts." (Chapter 7:2)

God wants us to see who we are and whose we are. God does not want us to forget where we are going.

God wants us to succeed in our lives. But that success only comes from our faith in God; it comes from the hands of God;

Don't get me wrong. Something new always comes from God. If there is anything new, it does not come from what we do. It comes only from what God can do for us. All good things in life come from God, and that there is no joy apart from God (2:24-25).

So as we begin this New Year, let us remember our time. We don't know how much time we have left in our lives. But we need to tell ourselves that every moment we have is a gift from God. God wants us to be happy. God wants us to enjoy our time. But we should also know this: we need to make the most of our time not only for ourselves but for the works God is calling us to do.

Our time is limited. But God's time is unlimited. God has eternal life prepared for those who believe in Jesus Christ.

Those who are aware of our limitedness and humbly commit their lives to Jesus Christ and use their time wisely for God will not only

have a life of quality here in this world but also in God's eternal kingdom for evermore.

Amen.