

*“SACRAMENT OF TIME” ©Joyce Kelly*

Sermon Notes for The Rev. Joyce Kelly

Supply Minister of Worship and Pastoral Care

Bloor Street United Church

FIFTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST – June 27, 2010

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*Readings: Based on Ecclesiastes 3; Matthew 16; II Corinthians 6*

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“Do not miss the grace of God. Behold, now is the time, the welcome time, the day of salvation! No obstacle is in your way,” says Paul to Jesus’ friends at Corinth, and to his friends here this morning. Behold, now is the time.

Time, elusive time, has power in our lives. The spiritual question is whether time empowers us, or has power over us. Is Time a negative or a positive thing?

The other day, I had a terrible couple of hours – my appointment book went missing. I say that it ‘went’ missing instead of ‘it was missing’ because it’s as if it has a life of its own. I looked in all the familiar places – again and again – not here – not there. I totally depend on it to remind me what to do with my time – where to be, who to see. Sometimes I wonder if we handle time, or if our ‘handling of time’ handles us. It’s sad to say, but when I found my book, life seemed to be in order again!

I

“When long before time and the worlds were begun, when there was no earth and no sky and no sun, and all was deep silence and night reigned supreme, and even our Maker had only a dream ...” says Peter Davison’s hymn.

Out of deep silence – morning and night – the first day – God’s Time was begun ... God’s dream manifest. KAIROS, Greek for ‘God’s time’, ebbs and flows until all things align and the world is shaped with goodness that God desires, and all things come together for God-only-knows what purpose. Sometimes it takes generations, a global spance, and sometimes it’s simply our own heart (and life) aligning with another. Kairos – God’s time.

And not out of deep silence, but out of the deep human need to be in control, to take charge, we have CHRONOS – human-invented time – sundial or digital – that we write in appointment books. Chronos – chronological time orders our lives. We are obsessed with it.

Jesus says, “Interpret the signs of the time.” Anne Murray sings, “Time, don’t run out on me.” Time is on our side; time is against us; time’s running out; old Father time; we will if we have time. But a wise old lady at the Captiva Chapel, Rose Timmer, always said in the face of predicted chaos, “It will all be fine – in God’s time.” These familiar phrases remind us of our tandem ‘step in time.’ Depending upon what’s happening, time seems to be either ‘for’ us or ‘against’ us.

When hard times pierce our heart – when we get news that someone we love has died – time stands still. Seconds bound by trauma imbed in our memories (body, mind, and soul) as if they were minutes, hours, an eternity. Where were you when Kennedy died? When the planes struck the towers? With my whole body, I can still feel the slow-motion impending impact of a head-on collision I was in over 30 years ago. And it took many more years for the unexpected flashbacks to stop pulling me to the side of the road until they passed. Ask a veteran about wartime. Trauma etches itself in personal time, and in a nation’s.

But so do good times – when time seems to fly, and we don’t want it to end – a first kiss, an awesome sunset, the sleeping face of your child, a hug exactly when you need

it, the aha in someone's eyes in the exact moment you share an understanding. Good times hold us all in time!

Through hard times and good, we are part of God's Dream, for it is God who creates the Sacrament of Time – holy moments when heavenly portals open and we step through. "Do not miss the grace of God," says Corinthians. "Behold, now is the time, the welcome time, the day of salvation! No obstacle is in your way."

## II

Spiritual teacher Carolyn Myss says, "Time is part of God's gift of Life that we must learn to receive with reverence, and celebrate as Sacrament ... every second of life is lovingly held to be of great value." Through trauma, glory, trial, tribute – Kairos (holy time) bobs and weaves with chronos (human time) in our relationships, down all our years, through all our seasons.

Kentucky farmer poet, Wendell Berry says: ("*Collected Poems*")

Within the circles of our lives  
we dance the circles of the years,  
the circles of the seasons  
within the circles of the years,  
the cycles of the moon  
within the circles of the seasons,  
the circles of our reasons  
within the cycles of the moon.

Again, again we come and go,  
changed changing. Hands  
join, unjoin in love and fear,  
grief and joy. The circles turn,  
each giving into each, into all.  
only the dance keeps us here ...

300 years ago Isaac Watts echoed 3000-year-old Psalm 90, now in 30-year-old inclusive language: Time, like an ever-rolling stream bears all of us away; we fly forgotten as a dream dies at the opening day.

Within the circling dance of this congregation, we have had a brief ten-month whirl, and the dance goes on – hands changing, joining, unjoining – and will continue as it has for over a hundred years. May God find holy use of our time together.

Within the dance of the nations of this world, there is much twisting and turning, dipping and changing hands, some encircled with security fence, some with the free kick of a soccer ball. May wisdom guide our steps, and safety mark the way, and peace bless this world that needs it so desperately.

This dance with Time – receive with Reverence – the circles of our lives, of the years, the seasons, the reasons; again and again we come and go, change hands, give each other, receive, hold on, are held – the music of God’s dream in harmony.

Reverence! Look into the eyes of a newborn baby still “trailing clouds of glory from whence she’s come.” (Wordsworth) Hold the hands of someone who is dying, and

pray like you want someone to pray with you when your time comes. From the hold of hands and eyes we turn aside again – in circles of Mystery – God’s Time.

Time – celebrate as Sacrament – as the church does. God sings: I was there to hear your bawling cry; I’ll be there when you are old; I rejoiced the day you were baptized, to see your life unfold. Water poured, ancient blessing overflowing, God’s Grace vibrant in every cell.

Bread broken, wine poured, earth infused with heaven, God’s Grace so ingredient in these elements of everyday life that we should all be struck with awe, never the same again – holy moments when we are one with all, and all is one.

Time – receive with Reverence, celebrate as Sacrament – in your every day, whoever you meet, whatever your calendar says – maybe despite what it says. Look up to the sky, to the trees, down to garden’s glory, out to those around you, into their eyes, their hearts, in to that instinct that God has built into every one of us – that desire for Reverence, that need for the Sacred.

### III

“Be still, my soul, for God is on your side,” sings the Psalmist of old (131). And in the still centre, there is God.

But sometimes our appointment books get in the way. Store clerks say, “Have a good day” to which we might reply, “Sorry, my plans are already made.”

Spiritual Director Kristen Ingram tells about a retreat in the mountains with some other writers. “It has been a good time,” she says, “and here I am, loading the car to

go home. Rain turns to snow and for a moment I am gripped by the beauty of it. I watch one particular snowflake fall, then rise again on a little breeze, then fall, rise, fall, until suddenly, to my amazement, it is raining again. And then comes the rainbow!

I rush indoors, dripping wet, and tell the others who are dragging their suitcases to the door that if they hurry they might see snow and rainbow at the same time. Only one woman races outside, her face full of joy, expectant. Together, we stand in the downpour, and gaze at the great shimmering arch of colour hanging in the sky.

Everyone else seems to be chasing about for umbrellas and warm jackets, muttering 'If only I'd skipped the last session I could have got down the hill before it got so muddy.' "Not enough time", the word batted through the air like a badminton birdie. One man says, "If you've seen one rainbow, you've seen them all."

Kristen starts to explain that some are red on the bottom, some blue-violet ... but he isn't listening. His plans are already made. So she just goes out, gets in her car and drives away. The rainbow lasts until she turns the corner, long, in rainbow time.

#### IV

"I put this sign in the sky ... as long as the earth endures, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night, shall not cease" – circles and cycles of seasons and reasons – God's Time.

"This is God," says Paul, "in whom we live and move and have our being (Acts 17:28) – God standing at the altar of Creation, consecrating Time for our use for our brief spin on this ferris wheel, infusing Time with blessing, inviting us to eat the bread of delight and drink the cup of salvation – as if this day is the only one we'll ever have. God only knows the truth of that!

This is us – receiving ... and doing what with God's sacred gift?

There's a beautiful yellow butterfly that lives for only six days. Its time is ripe for dying as soon as it emerges. It uses all of its glory in hardly a heartbeat. It brings all of its beauty to each moment – while we fuss about deadlines, feel sorry for ourselves for some real or perceived snub, some ache or pain, while we forget that God is on our side – that all will be well – in God's time. That beautiful yellow butterfly lives its whole life fully while we fritter away any six of our days, or all of our days, as if they were endless.

Give us this day our daily bread, we pray – enough for this day – bread for body and soul. Behold, now is the time, the welcome time!

So, greet the welcome morning with delight. Forgive – toss off resentments that weigh you down; life's too short. Fight with passion for those who God favours – the poor, the powerless. Honour teachers and healers and leaders that God brings into your life. Play with abandon. Laugh without restraint. Hand out Joy like candy on Halloween.

Let your heart overflow with Gratitude; wrap it round all your friends and family, around yourself. Nurture the souls of your children, your grandchildren; tell them stories of Jesus, the old Story of God's faithful love come walking in earth-time, still walking in Kairos-time, guiding, sustaining generations in God's Sacrament of Time. Come and find the quiet centre of the Sacrament of Time – through Christ our Lord.  
Amen

*Scripture: from Ecclesiastes 3*

For everything there is a season,

a time for every matter under heaven.

A time to be born, and a time to die.

A time to plant and a time to harvest.

A time to weep and a time to laugh.

A time to mourn and a time to dance.

A time to throw away stones

and a time to gather stones together.

A time to embrace

and a time to refrain from embracing.

A time to keep and a time to throw away.

A time to keep silence and a time to speak.

A time to love and a time to hate.

A time for war and a time for peace.

*From Paul's letter to Corinthian church (II Ch 6)*

We urge you not to miss the grace of God. Behold, now is the time, the welcome time. Now is the day of salvation! No obstacle is in your way ... (Go forward with) purity, knowledge, forbearance, kindness, the Holy Spirit, genuine love, truthful speech, and the power of God ... (toward) righteousness.

And, Jesus says, “When it is evening, you say, ‘It will be fair weather, for the sky is red.’ And in the morning ‘It will be stormy today, for the sky is red and threatening.’ You know how to interpret the appearance of the sky, but you cannot interpret the signs of the times.

You can read all of these fully in Ecclesiastes 3, II Corinthians 6, and Matthew 16.