

The Time That Is Now

Ecclesiastes 3:1 *For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven.*

Each year we as a congregation covenant with each other to support, encourage and nurture the learning within our church community. Before us this morning are approximately 80 people who are willing to share their time and their talents to bring alive for our children and young people the good news of our faith.

A covenant, to my understanding, is a solemn and binding agreement made before God. So what we have shared in today is not just an official start to the church school year and the mid-week activities for 1994-95, it is a time when we once again pause to say that these activities are important in the life of our congregation.

This is an opportunity to publicly state our support for the leaders and teachers whose emphasis is focused on learning and teaching the story of our faith, and how our faith is intricately woven with everyday life. We also need to remember that there are groups who were not represented in the particular service – women's groups, men's groups, seniors, choirs, study groups, committees and those involved in annual events, these are also part of our learning community. Our worship services can also be included, because surely as we **gather** with one or two other people we are learning together and from one another.

One of the questions we could ask this morning is “Why do we bother?” Why do we bother trying to arrange any kind of educational programs? What is the point? Why can't we just come to church, sing the songs we like, say some prayers, read from scripture, have a sermon that makes us feel good and go home? Well, I hope McClure United Church provides some of the, because I like to sing the hymns and songs I know – to the tunes I know! However, if we are preparing for life in the twenty-first century then we have to know about our faith – the stories and mysteries that have thrilled and challenged generations before us, we have to know what we believe and how our beliefs impact on our everyday life and that of our world.

The reading from Ecclesiastes (Chapter 3:1-8) is a familiar and beautiful passage - “For everything there is a season, and time for every matter under heaven.” We, as a congregation, are looking to the possibilities of a new mission in the new millennium and rightly we should. But what are we going to do every minute of every day of every week of every month of every year from September 25, 1994 to the end of the new millennium? What are we going to do with the time that is now?

I invite you to pause for a moment, think carefully about your reasons for being part of McClure. Now let us ask ourselves, am I doing all I can to ensure that the reason I chose to be part of McClure is also the reason that might attract someone else. All of us can do something – a welcoming smile, a word of encouragement, a helping hand, or offer a block of time for a particular activity.

Time is probably the most precious commodity that any of us has, yet we often squander it aimlessly. The ten year old can't wait to be a teenager, the teenager can't wait to be an adult, and many adults aim for the day when they have a dream career, financial security, the ability to travel, and early retirement. Our society encourages us to be goal-oriented, looking to the future, but we don't get a whole lot of information about enjoying the journey – the time that is now.

Much has been written about the pursuit of happiness, that illusive state of mind that is considered the ultimate. Some people consider that the happiest time of their lives was somewhere in the past – the good old days. Some people live in the future, a verse of a song was brought to my attention this week:

That's okay Rose would say,
Don't you worry non.
We'll have good times by and by
Next fall when the work's all done.

The sad part was that Rose didn't live to see the next fall.

It is important that we remember our roots and where we have come from, it is important that we vision for the future, but the only time that we really have is now. How do we use that time? What is on our list of priorities? Is our faith a vital part of our time? Or do we fit it in around the edges? What is our mission for today?

One comment that can sometimes be heard around churches is that “children are the church of the future”. Personally I have never quite understood what that meant. Because it seems to say that value and contribution are only of worth when you are an adult. We as adults need the children and you people. We need their questions, we need the challenges they present to us for life in the 1990's, we need their eagerness, their energy, their joy, we need their acceptance and we need their love. I invite you to take a close look at our bulletin cover this morning, the pictures that the children have drawn are amazing in their detail, showing how observant the children are about McClure United Church - not only the building, but what goes on here. “If any of you put a stumbling block before one of these little ones who believe in me, it would be better for you if a great millstone were hung around your neck and you were thrown into the sea” (Mark chapter 9 verse 42). This verse from our gospel reading was talking about new converts, but it can also apply to those who are of tender years in our faith community.

So what is our mission for today? What are we doing with the time that is now? Certainly one of our tasks is to encourage life-long learning from the youngest child to the oldest person. There is never a time when learning and understanding are inappropriate. The Bible is the book of our faith, we need to know the stories, to puzzle over the mysteries, to discuss them with others, and see how the situations and attitudes are similar to ours and what we can learn from them. It is only learning, it is learning until it becomes part of us, internalizing the story until our excitement cannot be contained and we have to share the good news – the gospel – with others.

Jesus said, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the greatest and first commandment”. How can we say we love God if we don't know the story of the people of God and their interaction with God? Or if we do not recognize the value of our own faith story?

Secondly, our mission is to look at the world around us. What decisions are for the benefit and well-being of people, the men and women, the young people and the children of the our world? What decisions are for profit, for power and for destruction? Where is the voice and action of the church in these decisions?

Jesus said, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the greatest and first commandment. And the second is like it – You shall love your

neighbour as yourself. There is no other commandment greater than these". (Mark chapter 12 verse 30-31).

Our mission for today, for the time that is now, is to find creative ways to make this two commandments become a reality. Amen.

Joan Brown

Covenant with church school teacher, mid-week leaders, and congregation.

McClure United Church

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