

“Turn, Turn, Turn”

Rev. Ken McGarry at The First Church in Stoneham, Massachusetts
December 15, 2024 - Third Sunday of Advent

[Isaiah 12:2-6; Luke 3:7-18](#)

“To everything (turn, turn, turn) there is a season (turn, turn, turn) and a time for every purpose under heaven.” These lyrics from the recording of “Turn! Turn! Turn!” by folk rock group The Byrds, which was the number one song in the United States on this day in 1965, were written by folk music legend Pete Seeger in 1959 based on the text of King James translation of Ecclesiastes, which states:

To every thing there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven: A time to be born, and a time to die; a time to plant, and a time to pluck up that which is planted; a time to kill, and a time to heal; a time to break 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 get, 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 (Eccl. 3:1-8).

These words of wisdom from a sage of ancient Israel observe that as time passes, and as seasons change from one to another, what is appropriate or possible in any given moment will change in another, just as summer is the time for sunbathing and winter (and late fall) is the time for shivering (at least where we are, well north of earth’s equator).

This biblical observation, however, is challenged by other biblical writers, especially the prophets, many of whom could see the changing times and seasons and the changing ways of people in them turning to a new season when the older ways of people will forever change into new ways, when there will no longer be *any* time to kill or a time to destroy or a time to weep or a time to hate or a time for war.

At *this* time, in this season of Advent, we pay attention to the call of the prophets for their good vision to be realized. We hope and pray for the dawning of the day when the world’s people hate and make war no longer and all will enjoy drawing

water from the wells of salvation as we live together in peace. But we are called to do more than just hope and pray for that good day to come, we are called to work to make it so.

In today's gospel lesson from Luke, we read of Jesus' kinsman John the Baptist, a prophet in his own time, as he called all who could hear to do just this, to work for the realization of the good day when justice and peace would be enjoyed by all people. John cried out in the wilderness, calling people to repent, or turn, from any of their ways that opposed the desire of God for all people to enjoy justice and well-being. And so when the crowds came to him asking, "What, then, should we do?" he instructed them to turn from hoarding things and to share their clothing and food with those who had none. When wealthy tax collectors came to him asking, "What should we do?" he told them to turn from the collectors' common practice of taking from people more than what was required so that they could line their own pockets with extra "collection fees." When soldiers came to him and asked, "What should we do?" he instructed them to turn from their ways of extorting money from the less powerful.

John the prophet called the crowds, tax collectors, and soldiers to *turn from* their ways of gaining and hoarding at the expense of others and to *turn to* ways that are more loving, dignifying, and just. In this turning away from one way of interacting with others by turning towards a better way that helps other people draw from the wells of salvation, they would be moving themselves and the world more towards the good day of God's perfect reign when the whole world would be full of God's perfect light and there would be no more seasons or times for hate or war.

Today, in this season of Advent, I pray that we would heed John the Baptizer's call, turning from our own ways of serving ourselves and turning towards ways that lead to the growth of light for all. And as we turn, turn, turn to making this season more merry and bright for others, may our turning take us down paths on which we will enjoy more of heaven's promised gifts of hope, joy, love, and peace. Dear Christian friends, rejoice! For these are God's gifts coming to you and through you today and always. Amen.