



VILLAGE
CHURCH
Presbyterian (USA)

Healing Through the Gifts of Time

SCRIPTURE:
Ecclesiastes
3:1-8

Nov. 10, 2024 — Sermon by Rev. Dr. Rodger Nishioka

Thanksgiving is in three weeks. We're talking about healing. Our world is beautiful and yet hurting. So how do we help to heal the world? Last week, we talked about healing through remembrance. It was our All Saints' Day service. Today we're talking about healing through the gifts of time.

John told me he had finally made partner in his firm. It was almost a three and a half year process. It was not unusual for him to work 60 and sometimes 70-hour weeks. That was all part of the process. He told Catherine, his spouse, that things would get better after he made partner. She understood and hoped for that. Two of his three kids became teenagers during that time, so they seemed less worried about not having as much time with dad.

But Mathias (Matty), his fifth grader, really loved his dad and yearned for more time with him. Catherine would remind John of that on a regular basis. Matty wanted more time. John did as well. So about a month after making partner, John came home a little early because that night he was going to take Catherine out to a big dinner with some prospective clients and their spouses. He made his way through the backyard and there was Matty, his fifth grader. He was throwing the football and catching it to himself, and he looked at his dad, saw him, realized it was early and his face lit up. He said, "Dad, you're home!" And John said, "Yeah, buddy, I am." And Matty ran up and hugged his dad. John loved that hug, hugged his son back, kissed the top of his head.

John said, "Hey, actually I need to get in the house, pick up a couple things. I'm going to change clothes. Your mom and I were going out to a dinner with some clients for work." Matty said, "Oh, of course," and he gave his dad a hug. John made his way in. John told me later he was going up the stairs to the second-floor bedrooms and he stopped. And I said

to him, "I think that was Holy Spirit." He went back downstairs, pulled off his tie, threw it on the couch, went to the backyard and said, "Hey, I've actually got a few minutes, want to play catch?" Matty's face lit up and said, "Yeah, dad, of course!" And they played catch for the next few moments. John asked his son about his day. Matty was telling him stories about his day. John told me there were two or three times when he was bent over laughing. He forgot how funny his son was and how good it was to hear about his day.

After about 30 minutes or so, Catherine came through the backyard and said, "Hi." She loved seeing them playing catch. And that reminded John that he needed to get in the house, change, and take Catherine out to dinner that night. He told Matty, "I've got to go." Matty said, "Of course, dad," and gave him a hug. Later on at dinner, he was sitting there smiling from ear to ear. And Catherine nudged him and said, "What are you doing?" And he said, "I was thinking about Matty. That 30 minutes... I think it was the best 30 minutes of my whole week." That 30 minutes, that gift of time.

That really is the precious commodity about which we are all yearning, right? Over and over again, people say, "I wish I had more time." Over and over again. Into this moment, speaks the teacher. Ecclesiastes scholars are not sure if this is poetry or prophecy. The book itself is intriguing. But the verses just read for us some of you know by heart because you grew up in the 60s. "For everything there's a season, turn, turn, turn and a time for every purpose under heaven, a time to be born and a time to die, a time to pluck up what you've planted and a time to plant, a time to build up and a time to tear down, a time to mourn and a time to laugh, a time to weep, a time to dance, a time for war and a time for peace."

In scripture, there's two kinds of time. One is Kronos. We get the word 'chronology' from that. The

Greek word Kronos, that's human time. And each of these 28 moments in these 14 pairs, are all Kronos time. This is human time. These 28 statements, they form the basis of our lives together. A time to build up and a time to tear down, a time to reap and a time to sow. This is about human life. This is Kronos.

But the opening phrase that says, "For everything, there is a season and time for every matter under heaven." That is kairos. Kairos is God's time. Kronos is human time. Our limited minds, even though we are created in the image of God, cannot comprehend—cannot possibly grasp—the maker of the universe, God's time. Kairos is God's time. It encompasses all, including Kronos (or human) time.

That's why the Psalmist sings, and we just said in the call to worship, "better is one day in God's court." In God's heaven. That's kairos. Better is one day in God's kairos than a thousand human days because kairos time is different from Kronos time. Not necessarily the best or better, but it's different and we can't comprehend of it. So that's why I think God comes to us in Jesus to show us that God also understands Kronos time; a time to be born, a time to die.

Kronos and Kairos. I'm mindful that in this last week of Kronos (human) time, it's been eventful for you and for me, and for our nation, for our world. I'm mindful that after Tuesday and Wednesday, a number of us are pleased and grateful for the results of the election. I'm also mindful that a number of us are troubled. One of you wrote to me and said, "I am devastated." All of that matters to God. God holds all of that because that is Kronos. That is human time. And we know this because God loves us and created us in God's own image, redeemed us through Jesus Christ, that what matters to us matters to God. So wherever you are, this past week matters to God. The key for you and for me is to remember that Kronos time is in the midst of kairos. It's in the midst of God's time. God holds all of this. A time to be born and a time to die, a time to weep and a time to laugh, a time to tear down and a time to build up. God holds all of this in kairos time. That's the truth of our lives.

And if we remember that, then we will survive as the people of God have always survived over these many, many years because God holds us all. It is the power of time and the gift that is time, kairos time, that can bring healing even in the midst of our human time.

I taught at Columbia Seminary and for a number of years many of the students would engage in something called clinical pastoral education, or CPE. It's a clinical practice for those who are going to be pastors in churches, especially those who wanted to go into counseling or chaplaincy. They had to be a part of CPE. There were different experiences throughout the city of Atlanta.

One of my second-year students and advisees, Courtney, came to us fresh out of Duke University. She was 23 years old, petite, blonde, blue-eyed, vivacious, bright, smart, sharp, intelligent, and a wonderful person. She was in CPE and got assigned to Grady Memorial Hospital in downtown Atlanta. Grady is the largest public hospital in Georgia—one of the top five largest public hospitals in the United States. It is a place where miracles happen every day and it is a hard place to serve as a chaplain. She had had one intro course in pastoral care in her first year in seminary. She had two days of orientation to start her CPE time and then she started walking into hospital rooms. She had a badge that said Courtney and her last name. It said 'Chaplain,' too, even though she was not yet ordained. Even though she was not yet finished with her master's degree in divinity, she was functioning as a chaplain. She would walk into a room and her job was to say, "Hello, my name is Courtney. I'm a chaplain here. May I spend some time with you?"

I saw her a couple of weeks after she'd started CPE. She was walking across campus and I said, "How are you doing?" And she shook her head and said, "Terrible." I said, "Why, Courtney?" She was down and that was rare for her. She said, "I don't belong here." I said, "Court, what are you talking about? Of course you do." She told me that the previous day she was on her rounds. This is her second week at Grady. She went into a room and she saw this lovely older Black woman lying on the bed and this handsome Black man in a chair next to her. He was holding her hand. She walked in and said pleasantly, "Hello, my name is Courtney. I'm a chaplain here. May I spend some time with you?"

The gentleman looked up at her with steely eyes and said, "Little girl, this is my wife of 63 years. She is the love of my life and she has the Alzheimer's. And two weeks ago, she stopped recognizing me. If you can tell me how God is in this, you can stay. If

you can't, I prefer you just move on." I said, "Court, what did you do?" She said, "Oh, I wanted to move on. I wanted to leave. I was trying, but my legs wouldn't move. I was saying to my legs: Let's move on. I'm an imposter. I have no idea why I'm here. I should just pack up my things, leave seminary, and go back to North Carolina."

I said, "But you wouldn't move?" She says, "No, I couldn't move, Rodger. I tried, I couldn't move. I just stood there frozen, feeling ridiculous. And I looked at him holding this beautiful woman's hand, I saw how much he loved her, I saw how beautiful she was, and all I could think about was my own grandparents. And then... I'm so embarrassed. I just began to cry. I couldn't help it. I'm standing there looking down and I just started crying." I said, "What happened next?" And she said, "I looked up and the gentleman was looking at me with wide eyes and tears streaming down his face. And he reached out his hand and he said, 'Chaplain, I'd be honored if you would stay.'"

I said, "What did you do?" She said, "Well, I grabbed the chair and I pulled it up next to him, and

I held his hand and I held her hand across the bed. And Dr. Nishioka, I just sat there and cried. I couldn't recite scripture, I couldn't say a prayer. I just sat there with them and cried. Was that okay?" I said, "Oh, Courtney, that was perfect. You were gifting them your ministry of presence. You are gifting them with time."

Time. The teacher in Ecclesiastes says, "For everything, there's a season and a time, for every matter under heaven." That's kairos time.

Our lives, our day-to-day. Of course it matters. Of course it's important to God. But the truth is that our day-to-day, our lives, all of this belongs in the whole spectrum of kairos time. It all belongs to God. God holds all of us, and all things, all matters, under heaven in God's own hands. That is what is true. It has always been true. It is true now, and it will be true in the years to come. And if we think any less of that, then we deceive ourselves and we are not paying attention to God healing through the gift of time. Thanks be to God. In the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.