

For Such a Time as This – There is a time for everything.

Inspiration comes from interesting places. When I was asked to preach a couple of months ago, almost immediately, the Ecclesiastes scripture came to mind. As I was mulling over this scripture, the phrase, “for such a time as this” kept going through my head, and I had to look up where that came from. In the middle of all this mulling, I attended the Toastmasters Convention. One of the education sessions was “When Generations Connect” by Phil Gwoke, who is a writer, market researcher, generational expert, trainer, and the managing director of BridgeWorks, a company that is dedicated to powering potential by cultivating meaningful human connections. I learned a lot about how different generations communicate and interact with each other. One of the most fascinating things I learned was not the linear interactions of the generations, but the cyclical nature of the generations and how that affects the times that we live in and how the times we live in affects the generations.

For our purposes the dates of the generations are not that important, and if you look up the dates they will be different every place you look. We need to add one more generation, the Traditionalists. They grew up during the Depression and World War Two. The Baby Boomers grew up after the war, Generation X grew up in the 60’s, 70’s, and 80’s, Millennials grew up in the 90’s to about 2010, and the

Gen Z's are growing up right now. If we look at 1943, the height of WWII, as twelve o'clock on our diagram, we see that these are tough times for people to be growing up in. Tough times create strong people. Strong people create good times. Good times makes for comfy people. Comfy people allow for tough times.

Generational leaders say that it takes about 80 years for this cycle to repeat itself. If we look back 80 years, the year is 1863, and the Civil War is going on in the United States and Canada is 4 years away from becoming a nation. If we roll back another 80 years, the year is 1783, and we are at the height of the American Revolution. Loyalists are pouring into Canada from the United States. These were tough times to be growing up in. What does that have to do with us today? Well, if we roll the clock ahead 80 years, the year is 2023. There may not be another world war, though, if you believe what some people are writing, there could be the push for a one world government with a one world leader and a one world economy.

Either one is scary. We are living in tough times. Covid has shut the world down and we are not exactly sure how to start it back up again. The world as we know it has changed. Things that we have taken for granted, like finding work, being able to travel, and even going to school, have all changed. There are restrictions about doing the things that we have always done. Even as the restrictions are lifting, there are still concerns about what life will look like in the next little while. Having

said all this, what does that have to do with our scriptures today? There are cycles everywhere.

Living in a rural community we understand cycles and seasons better than most. Ecclesiastes 3:1-8 says the same thing, in different words. The writer of Ecclesiastes is telling us that there are seasons in life, and we need to be aware of them.

*There is a time for everything,
and a season for every activity under the heavens:*

*² a time to be born and a time to die,
a time to plant and a time to uproot,
³ a time to kill and a time to heal,
a time to tear down and a time to build,

a time to keep and a time to throw away,
⁷ a time to tear and a time to mend,
a time to be silent and a time to speak,*

The cycle of farming/gardening is: planting, growing, harvesting, and what else? Planning. Without planning, there will be no planting, growing, or harvesting. During this planning period we strategize and figure, we mull and decide. What crops do we want to plant? Which field or piece of the garden are we going to plant, and into what? What fertilizer is needed? What seeds need to be ordered? Do we plant another crop this year? Or is this the year we retire?

Like gardening and farming, our church too has had seasons, too. Seasons when things didn't look so good for the church, seasons when the church was growing quickly, and times for new buildings and expansions, times when we held off on expansion. Today we stand in tough times, as a world, as a community, and as a church. What should we do when we have tough times? The book of Esther is written during tough times.

Let's look at the story of Esther. First, we will meet the characters.

- King Xerxes (Ahasuerus/Khshayarsh) ruled Persia from 486–464 B.C
- Queen Vashti – the beautiful wife of King Xerxes
- Esther – Jewess, part of the beauty pageant
- Mordecai – A Jewish gatekeeper and cousin to Esther
- Haman – Head of the princes

Next, we need to set the scene. We are in the third year of King Xerxes reign. King Xerxes is having a military planning meeting about how Persia is going to defeat Greece. Good food and wine have flowed freely and on the seventh day of the feast, Queen Vashti is summoned to appear. She refuses and is punished. Some commentaries say that there is a space of time, and the defeat of the Persians by the Greeks, between the removal of Queen Vashti and the beauty pageant that takes place to find a new queen. Whether the beauty pageant happens immediately

or after a while, Esther is part of this beauty pageant. The king chooses her as his new queen. Esther does not reveal that she is a Jew because her cousin Mordecai tells her not to. Shortly after this, Mordecai uncovers a plot to kill the king.

Mordecai tells Esther, and Esther tells the king on Mordecai's behalf. Meanwhile, Haman, is promoted to the head of the princes and starts to flex his muscles and his power. Mordecai, a God-fearing man, does not bow down to Haman, or pay him homage, as he has been commanded to do. Haman hates Mordecai. Rather than get rid of just Mordecai, Haman sets out to get rid of all the Jews. Haman persuades Xerxes, a rather emotional and changeable man, to sign a decree that the people of Persia can kill the Jews, on a set date one year from now, because they are a threat to the people of Persia. When Mordecai hears this, he tears his clothes, puts on sackcloth, sits in the ashes, and mourns. Esther is worried about Mordecai and sends him clothes, which Mordecai refuses. When Esther asks why, Mordecai tells her about Haman's plan and says, *"Do not imagine that you in the king's palace can escape any more than all the Jews. For if you remain silent at this time, relief and deliverance will arise for the Jews from another place and you and your father's house will perish. And who knows whether you have not attained royalty for such a time as this?"*

There is no question that they were living in tough times. Their very existence depended on what Esther did next. What did Esther do? Esther did three

things: 1) She called Mordecai, and all Jews, to fast for three days; 2) She, and her maidens, committed to fast for three days; 3) She asked for an audience with king. Asking for an audience with the king could get her killed. For the rest of the story read the book of Esther. Esther and Mordecai found themselves in tough times. Those tough times made them into strong people.

We are in tough times and need to decide what our future will hold. In the past the demographics of the church were evenly split between the five generations that are typically found in a church.

- 1st generation – 80+
- 2nd generation – 60-80
- 3rd generation – 40-60
- 4th generation – 20-40
- 5th generation – Under 20

Look around you. The demographics have changed. 60-70 percent of our congregation is the first two generations. The remaining 30-40 percent of the congregation is made up of the other three generations. It used to be that the oldest two generations could say, “Let the younger ones do the job. We’re old, we’ve had our turn, and we’re tired.” The problem is, in the past, when our oldest generation

were passing the reigns to us, there were a lot of us to take on that responsibility.

Now there are very few to take on the responsibilities.

Which brings us to this season of discerning. Will we work to be here for the Teresa's, Jacob's, Felix's, Caleb's, the Tristan's, Talia's, Taylor's, Dean's, and Ruby's? Are we going to birth something new, or will we choose to let the church retire? People who sew know that sometimes we need to cut things apart so that we can mend them, or recycle them into something brand new. Now is not a time to be silent, it is a time to speak, to share what your vision of the future looks like. If that means retirement, so be it.

Tough times create strong people. In our tough times we can follow Esther's example: We can fast, we can pray, and we can do the hard work. Remember, that whatever decision that we make, it will take hard work, on everyone's part.

Retiring can take as much work, sometimes more work, than restructuring and moving forward. Whatever we decide, we will come out stronger for going through the process of discernment.