



Mike DeWine, Amy Acton, Jon Husted; photo credit Cleveland.com (March 26, 2020)

Greetings!

Everything Has Its Time

For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven:

²a time to be born, and a time to die;

a time to plant, and a time to pluck up what is planted;

³a time to kill, and a time to heal;

a time to break down, and a time to build up;

⁴a time to weep, and a time to laugh;

a time to mourn, and a time to dance;

⁵a time to throw away stones, and a time to gather stones together;

a time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing;

⁶a time to seek, and a time to lose;

a time to keep, and a time to throw away;

⁷a time to tear, and a time to sew;

a time to keep silence, and a time to speak;

⁸a time to love, and a time to hate;

a time for war, and a time for peace.

The God-Given Task

⁹What gain have the workers from their toil? ¹⁰I have seen the business that God has given to everyone to be busy with. ¹¹He has made everything suitable for its time;

moreover he has put a sense of past and future into their minds, yet they cannot find out what God has done from the beginning to the end. ¹²I know that there is nothing better for them than to be happy and enjoy themselves as long as they live;

¹³moreover, it is God's gift that all should eat and drink and take pleasure in all their toil. ¹⁴I know that whatever God does endures forever; nothing can be added to it, nor anything taken from it; God has done this, so that all should stand in awe

before him. ¹⁵That which is, already has been; that which is to be, already is; and God seeks out what has gone by. (Ecclesiastes 3: 1-15, NRSV)

A year ago, Dr. Allen and I attended a Multiply Ohio event at New City Church in Dayton. The next morning, we attended a breakfast at Clifton UMC where the ORV hosted the Rev. Christian Coon from Chicago's Urban Village UMC and the Rev. Dr. Jan Davis of Central UMC in Fayetteville, AR. They were guests sharing with leaders in our district about new kinds of ministries for the local church to reach into their communities in new and exciting ways. Their message was however overshadowed by world events. The 'word was out' about the novel coronavirus. The word was confusing, almost surreal. Little did we know that for many of us in that room this would be the last time we would see each other for nearly a year! The Coronavirus was real and sweeping across the country and globe.

In the United States, it started first in Washington State. In particular, there was a nursing home, where 28% of the residents would die of the virus. On March 11, it cancelled the NBA season in Oklahoma City when a player tested positive for C-19. All of the high school, college and professional sports followed suit in the next days. Businesses, schools and churches were impacted. The country was stunned, and we were stunned, too.

A few days later Bishop Palmer offered in a video address to the West Ohio Conference where he encouraged a pause of worship for a short time. Little did we know that this would continue for a longer period. As state and federal officials began to engage, a system unfolded. At 2 p.m. each day, Governor DeWine spoke with then, Chief Health Advisor Dr. Amy Acton. Each gave truthful, comforting, insightful, but stark information. At the time Ohio was a model of leadership for the country. Both leaders prepared us and encouraged us to act. Wear your mask and socially distance yourself from others. Wash your hands frequently. Don't touch your face!

Eventually, Dr. Acton would become a political liability to the Governor. With death threats upon her husband and children and protests in front of her home, she resigned her position. Yet another reminder that truth and politics struggle with one another. Jesus once said, "the truth will set you free" (John 8:32). Dr. Acton, a religious Jew, found a commonality with Jesus. Both are remembered for their conflicts in speaking truth to power and the overt subtleness of racism.

Jesus quoted Hebrew scripture extensively. This passage from Ecclesiastes has been a favorite of mine for a long time, but I don't recall Jesus quoting it. However, it is still part of the material that he would have been familiar with and no doubt he knew its impact and meaning on his culture.

When I was a young boy this passage became the basis of [Turn! Turn! Turn!](#), a very popular pop-song by the British rock group, the Byrds. I have used this text for funeral occasions, but it is helpful for more than those moments. Life has a beginning, a middle and an end. In Christian tradition, we believe that through the



Resurrection it cycles over again with God in Heaven. For this reason, it feels very appropriate for the season of Lent.

Verses 9-15 are poignant. They produce a word of advice if you will. The word is a reminder that God is the creator, and we are not. God's life does not have a beginning, middle and an end for God is eternal! The text reminds us that so much of what we humans consider as important simply does not measure up in the Divine scheme of things. In addition, we are created to enjoy our lives which is gratitude to the God who created us. And as such, we need to pay attention to the fact that *"whatever God does endures forever; nothing can be added to it, nor anything taken from it; God has done this, so that all should stand in awe before him."* (v. 14)

What God is about and what we are invited to participate in *is* timeless. God is not bound by the human condition or the constraints that we place on each other. In a season of pandemic I take great solace in this notion. So many have been lost. Too many have lived in fear. We all have suffered separation from family and friends. This pandemic has negatively impacted persons of color, the elderly and the poor. Our lives have been totally disrupted. We could have done better individually and corporately. But in the midst of this, God did not stop being God. Because we have breath to claim this truth – we have HOPE.

HOPE is upon us in this season. On Sunday night, March 14 at 6 p.m. on the [Ohio River Valley Facebook page](#), district leaders will lead a brief service to remember the impact of Covid- 19 ([worship bulletin](#)). Together we will remember those who have died, those who have recovered, first responders, medical personnel and the congregations of our district. Dr. Allen and I have the privilege of sharing the Sacrament of Holy Communion with you, so please have elements of bread and wine at your side and in all five counties we will share in the Lord's Supper together. I hope you will join us.

Peace,

Rev. Dr. Todd D. Anderson, West Ohio Superintendent
Ohio River Valley District, United Methodist Church

