

**SERMON**  
**August 25, 2019**  
**The Reverend Dr. Phebe L. McPherson**

LUKE 13:10-17

TURN! TURN! TURN!

Words from the Book of Ecclesiastes. Adaptation and Music by Pete Seeger

*To everything (turn, turn, turn) There is a season (turn, turn turn)  
And a time for every purpose under heaven.  
A time to be born, a time to die; a time to plant, a time to reap; a time to kill,  
a time to heal; a time to weep, a time to laugh.  
A time to break down, a time to build up, a time to mourn, a time to dance.  
A time to cast away stones a time to gather stone together.  
A time of love, a time of hate; a time of war, a time of peace;  
A time you may embrace, a time to refrain from embracing.  
A time to gain, a time to lose; a time to rend, a time to sew;  
A time to love, a time to hate; a time for peace, I swear it's not too late*

Thousands of children are getting ready to start school! Getting a new backpack and supplies seems to be the focus. Back in the day at George Washington Elementary School in New Jersey, we didn't have backpacks. And we didn't have buses either. I walked about a mile to school each day with my arms around two stacks of books balanced on a blue cloth three-ring binder. Do some of you remember those blue cloth binders? The older I got, the more books I had to carry and balance. By high school we all had slumped shoulders from the load. At George Washington Elementary School we ended every week with a Friday Assembly. The gymnasium was set up with chairs. We filed in. Miss Riggs, the Principal, began each Friday Assembly by reading from the Book of Ecclesiastes.

*To everything, there is a season, and a time for every purpose under heaven,*

The recitation of these *times and seasons* gave me, even as a young child, a profound sense of security. Maybe the good feeling was derived from the rhythmic poetry. Maybe it was her deep voice that calmed me. Maybe it was the repetition of the weekly event. The predictability that made me feel steady. It could have been the matter-of-fact-ness—the yin for every yang—

so that the vicissitudes of life didn't seem so scary. This ancient poem in the Book of Ecclesiastes, third chapter, part of the Bible's Wisdom Literature, was really the only thing I ever heard read from the Bible as a child. I thought it was beautiful. Even then, I understood how *egalitarian* it was. It made life seem *full of promise* for me and for all of us. I liked that we were *all in this together*. Miss Riggs read the words as if they were the most important thing she wanted to share with us. Decades later, I remember them. These words still provide me with that profound sense of security and calm. The words remind me that *life is a beautiful and sacred experience intended for all of us to share*. When I hear these words, today, I breathe a little easier and I stand a little taller.

Not like the woman in today's Gospel Lesson. I find the story about the woman who was bent over for eighteen years quite disturbing on many levels. Luke says, "She was bent over and quite unable to stand up straight." I wonder what happened to her to cause her condition. In these stories, Luke uses sickness to teach us about signs of a deeper illness—a sickness of the soul. Healings in Luke's Gospel are used as *sign and promise* of a deeper health that Jesus makes possible. The woman is bent over. Her eyes *on the ground*. She does not see Jesus. But Jesus sees her. He is alarmed by her condition. He calls to her. What we see is the power of his touch. It is much stronger than anything that formerly happened to her. He sets her free from all that is past. *Free from what*, I wonder.

Over the years I have heard people say such terrible things to children not realizing the impact of their words. Words matter. They can cut and damage more than a razor. I hear the story of a young child who fell off a swing and broke his arm. His mother was heard saying, "You are such a bother. Now I'll have to take you to the hospital." The arm healed but the words left a life-long wound in the boy's sense of worth.

"You'll ever amount to much."

"You're not as smart or beautiful

or athletic or accomplished or capable as everyone else."

"It's all your fault."

"You were a mistake."

“If it weren’t for you...”

“You never do anything right.”

“You’re not *this*,” or “You’re not *that*.”

Over the years I’ve watched institutional selective privilege be given to some people and denied to others. Some people feel and become invisible. Some people believe they are not welcome, not valued, not given respect because of their ethnic, cultural, national or racial heritage. When you see *eyes on the ground*, it means that person knows what it means to live “against all odds” and finds hope “impossible.” *Eyes on the ground* means, “Stand up for what? To be knocked down again?” When you see violence, you are looking at hopelessness.

I wonder what happened to the woman in today’s Gospel Lesson? Eighteen years of it. Her life takes a dramatic turn Jesus calls to her and touches her and sets her free. Rules. Regs. Protocol. Status quo. Who’s in, who’s not. None of that is as important as she is. In Jesus’ eyes, she is significant. Worthy of his attention and his concern. And most importantly, worthy of being made whole and set free. *Significant* is the word that comes to mind. To be *raised to significance*, to be of value. It speaks to the social condition of the people. In Jesus’ eyes, everyone is—

Notable.

Worthy of attention.

Remarkable.

Outstanding.

Important.

Unforgettable.

Impressive.

Uncommon.

Extraordinary.

Exceptional.

Special.

Jesus sees each of us as significant. We are no longer invisible and without hope. Jesus calls the woman who has been bent and broken for eighteen years, heals her, and redeems her from

*insignificance*—meaning, *a life without purpose*. In Him she has a new purpose. He redeems her life.

I'd like to share with you a poem I wrote when Bruce's first grandchild was baptized. Since I'm not the principal of an elementary school and since I've got no Friday Assembly to open, perhaps this poem might remind each of us, just how wonderful and valuable, and *significant* we really, really are. And when we are reminded of this, we can share it with each other and children everywhere. The poem is titled, "The Really Really You."

DO YOU KNOW WHO YOU ARE,  
who you really, really are?  
You're not in your elbow, your ankle or knee,  
not your blue jeans or your super-cool tee.  
I don't mean to ask about great grandfather Lou,  
or why your hair is that strange color blue,  
if you drive a fast car,  
if you won the big race,  
if you've always come in second  
and never first place.  
Have you mama's bright eyes or papa's sixth toe?  
You may be those things, but you're much more,  
don't you know?

THE REALLY, REALLY YOU  
got underway,  
in a special place, one very special day.  
You were three months old, or six, or eight.  
Your age doesn't matter, it's never too late.  
You were dressed to your toes in cotton and lace,  
and the priest splashed water all over your face!  
You were startled, surprised, but before you knew,

IT HAPPENED!

in the Name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, too.

IT WAS IN THAT MOMENT

when you were looking around

and the priest made a *cross* with oil on your crown,

and whispered these words in a soft-sort-of-tone,

*You are marked forever as Jesus Christ's own.*

It was just before you let out that holler,

that woke up the deacon who then popped his collar.

That's when it happened, on that long ago day

that your parents have pictures of tucked somewhere away.

THE REALLY, REALLY YOU HAS BEEN GIVEN A CALL,

for God loves and needs you no matter how small.

So with Christ in your heart, your ankle and knee,

your elbow, your blue jeans and your super-cool tee,

with Christ in the middle, above and behind,

you've got what you need to be loving and kind.

SO LIFT UP YOUR FACE, YOUR EYES AND YOUR HEART,

for NOW is the time and you're ready to start.

On the shoulders of God you can see what is right,

you can see we're all ONE from up at that height.

REMEMBER GOD'S PEOPLE,

wherever you are,

at school, at play, at home or afar.

Tackle the challenges without fret or fear

with the courage to will and to persevere.

In soup kitchens, hospitals, with prisoners or strangers,

in battlefields, in hard times, with people in dangers.  
Let's hear that holler, whatever you do,  
'CAUSE CHRIST IS ALIVE IN THE REALLY, REALLY YOU!

For the woman in Luke's Gospel and for each of us, today's Gospel says,

Lift up your head,  
Don't be *eyes on the ground*.  
Stand up and throw your shoulders back!

For it is in Christ, in and through baptism, in and through Christ's community, that we are called and raised, each of us, all of us, *all are welcome*, each is *significant*, and worthy to live with dignity and respect—raised to a new life in Christ.

AMEN.