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Sermon for “Revive at Five”
Sunday, April 25, 2010

Ecclesiastes 3

A Time for Everything

¹ There is a time for everything,
and a season for every activity under heaven:

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,

⁴ a time to weep and a time to laugh,
a time to mourn and a time to dance,

⁵ a time to scatter stones and a time to gather them,
a time to embrace and a time to refrain,

⁶ a time to search and a time to give up,
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,

⁸ a time to love and a time to hate,
a time for war and a time for peace.

⁹ What does the worker gain from his toil? ¹⁰ I have seen the burden God has laid on men. ¹¹ He has made everything beautiful in its time. He has also set eternity in the hearts of men; yet they cannot fathom what God has done from beginning to end. ¹²

I stand before you, infinitely blessed. I have been given a loving family, an inquisitive mind, and ample opportunities. All of this, I cannot claim for myself. My creator, and my savior, Jesus Christ has blessed me.

I was born nineteen years ago in Spencer Iowa, a town renowned for its lack of size, cheerful population, and famous, relatively, library cat Dewey. As I said before, I have been given a truly loving family, whose influence first introduced me to my Messiah. I grew up Christian, and have never known a moment apart from His desperately needed grace. Yet, as I continue to age, my walk with Him is both tested and strengthened. Although still young, I feel as if a biography of my faith encompasses more than can be possibly told. Christ has touched each of our lives in ways that words cannot utter. Yet, tonight, I wish to share with you several crystallized images from my walk with my Creator.

There is a Time for Peace

Four years ago, I was given the chance to attend a camp called Leadership Quest. This experience, gained in the wilderness of northern Minnesota, has forever changed my life. Incidentally, and of no coincidence, only God's planning, this camp was where I first met David Stadem. Now, years later, we have been *arbitrarily* assigned as roommates in a college of which I had not heard of until a year ago. Besides meeting David, Leadership Quest was a time of deep questioning, thought, and connection to God. The intensive camp is designed to empower Christians towards leadership. The Bible, discussion, and lots of fun all bond the members to each other and Christ in an indescribable manner.

Yet the moment which I remember clearest is a simple image of poignant silence. The last afternoon, we were sent around the shores of Lake Superior, given instructions to refrain from speaking and *wrestle* with our God. I sat on a gentle precipice overlooking the placid waters of the lake, transfixed by creation's beauty. Never before had I felt so connected, so *one* with Christ. God's gift of speech sometimes fails us. In this instance, I cannot utter words that

convey understanding. As the gentle wind rustled the thin pages of my Bible, I was with God. God was with me. We were together, gazing at the magnificence of His work. I was loved by the deity no one can comprehend. I was filled with the grace that cannot be reciprocated. I was cherished by my Savior, and I was at peace.

There is a Time to Weep

It is strange that the most striking events often arise from inconsequential circumstances. Two years after Leadership Quest, I returned home from a night of work among the blissful days of summer. Instead of falling asleep, as most are wont to do after midnight, I decided to watch *Schindler's List*. Those of you who have seen it, know that the poignancy of Spielberg's work will wrench one's soul. I discovered this on that lonely, warm night. While the gaunt, naked members of God's chosen people were systematically executed by supposed Christians, I *wept*. Hot, unashamed tears adorned my wretched face as again, I *wrestled* with God. The question of His justice is one impossible to fully answer. I *still* wrestle with this question. How can God allow such base evil to exist in His world? How can the Savior watch his creations animalistically *kill* each other and remain apparently silent?

These thoughts mingled with the glistening tears that fell from my face. I was loved by God, but what comfort exists in a world where six million can be murdered for ethnicity alone? Sorrow and misery will forever plagued our world, and although perhaps cliché, only God can fully understand. We, His creations, must possess the faith to trust Him and know that He deals with us justly, though there be a time to weep.

There is a Time to Embrace

The summer between high school and college is a trying time for many, and faith is tested. For me, Christ was again confirmed as absolutely real. As I continued to strive towards God's will, while wrestling with questions all the while, my church again took me to a place that remains transfixed among my memories. This last summer, we were given the chance to see the Canadian Badlands Passion Play. While many have seen Gibson's film *The Passion of the Christ*, I submit that the work pales in comparison to this live production. Set outdoors, in an environment quite similar to Judea, the passion play presented the life of Jesus according to the book of Matthew.

And on that day, my Jesus became *tangible* in a way I had *never* experienced. In those few hours, countless moments of Jesus' life became imprinted in our memories. The words of Scripture became more than dusty phrases- it was TRUTH! His words made sense, and they were far more poignant than I'd ever experienced. When he said "love your neighbor," he wasn't gesturing at air. No, he picked up a beggar and thrust her towards the hypocritical Pharisees, providing a ready example to love. And it wasn't only his words that touched us. Jesus smiled. Jesus laughed. He prayed. He danced. My Messiah even made jokes. And yet, not everyone was irrevocably touched by Messiah. Towards the end of the play, harsh, cruel men grabbed my Lord and threw him before an angry crowd. And then the shouting began: CRUCIFY-CRUCIFY-CRUCIFY! I wanted to shout back. How could you do this to my Jesus? My inward cry was not heard though. They paraded him through the streets, weighted down with his cross. And when they nailed him to it, it seemed that even the skies were watching apprehensively. In that instant, the clouds flashed before the sun. Combined with the chilled wind, the kaleidoscope of light and shadow peered down on Jesus. And then, the Messiah died- uttering "It is finished."

But if I may be so bold, some of Jesus' most famous words are incomplete. His work was done, but the story was *not* finished. They placed him in a tomb. Guards assembled. The disciples gathered. And then, three days later, Jesus, my Savior, rose from the dead. And at that breathtaking moment, I again

wept. Tears of shame for failing Him, tears of joy at His triumph, and tears of gratitude at His mercy all mingled as they flowed down my flushed cheeks.

And I *embraced* my Christ. Although I cannot fully know His plans and I continue to struggle with life's questions, *I* will remain deeply in His grasp, forever in His abundant and inexplicable love. Ecclesiastes 3 provides words that are often spoken on days of celebration and sorrow. They remind us of God's faithfulness in providing everything in its own time. Yet, the words also remind us that there are moments of *misery* in life as well. Even though these moments plague our lives, God has called us to embrace Him and cling for dear life no matter what His plans bring, for there is a time for everything.