

"Now is the Time—Gifts of a New Year"  
A Christmas One, Ecclesiastes 3:1-13; Matthew 2:1-12  
January 1, 2017  
Congregational UCC, Buena Vista, CO  
Rev Rebecca K. Poos

There's a Right Time for Everything

**3** There's an opportune time to do things, a right time for everything on the earth:

**2-8**

An appointed time for birth and another for death,  
A proper time to plant and a later time to reap,  
A time to kill and another to heal,  
An appropriate time to destroy and another to construct,  
A right time to cry and another to laugh,  
A fitting time to lament and another to cheer,  
A loving time to make love and another to abstain,  
A right time to embrace and another to part,  
A right time to search and another to count your losses,  
A purposeful time to hold on and another to let go,  
A right time to rip out and another to mend,  
A good time to shut up and another to speak up,  
Forever a time to love and even, with care, a time to hate,  
A humble and cautious time to wage war and always a  
courageous and enduring time to make peace.

**I. TIME IS OURS**

For surely there is a "right time" for everything. Everything in its time, we say. This does not mean the same as "it must have been his time"—that's a superstitious, kind of fatalistic approach

to life, when we throw up our hands and figure we can't do a thing about anything.

For we do have a lot of say in how we live out our time—our lives and times. What we do with the time we're given. We don't have complete control over every minute—one can't prevent or predict a car accident in the next few hours, for instance.

But, we are co-creators with God in "God's time"—Kairos. The time we find ourselves in, walking on this earth, choosing our path as we move ahead. Will we walk arm-in-arm with the Spirit and with each other? Or on a path of our own choosing, paying no mind to God's leading and guiding—calling us forth?

**II. TIME OF GIFTS AND GIVING**

There is a time for giving gifts. A time for telling the story of the wise ones making their way on a long journey to pay homage to the newborn child who had been promised. The one they had followed a star—over hill and yon many long miles—to find.

Their gifts: Gold, Frankincense, Myrrh and possibly any variety of other treasures that we can only imagine, were the first Christmas gifts. They lie now at Jesus' feet—at the manger—as the foundation of our own gift-giving traditions at this special time.

(No, the department stores and Amazon Treasure Truck did NOT give us the notion of giving gifts at the holidays. That started a little further back!)

Gift-giving is a wonderful tradition. Sometimes wracked with disappointment (well-hidden or not!), and sometimes with outright humor, but it's "always the thought that counts" when it boils down to it.

After all, Mary and Joseph might *well* have preferred a hummus casserole or package of pampers and burp cloths over the gold at that moment. And booties certainly more than

embalming spice! (That ranks right up there with “oddest gifts at a baby shower—ever! – if you really think about it!

Jean Brody (Clarke’s dear mother) has a story about giving and receiving gifts this season.

### **III. AH, GIFTS! THEY DON’T ALWAYS FIT!**

#### **View from the Mountains—Jean Brody**

Well, I really hit the jackpot today. I have a friend here at Brookdale Littleton and at Christmas we exchange a few gifts. Since we (all the Residents) have been in quarantine for eight days, I did not go out to buy gifts this year. So I told my daughter what I wanted to give him and she graciously agreed to buy for me.

This morning (the day after Christmas) we sat in his apartment and exchanged gifts. He gave me more Pandora pieces for the necklace he gave me last year. I was thrilled.

Then came his turn to open. The first item was a lovely, warm Bronco sweatshirt. He tried it on. he is a big man and the XL would not even meet in the middle to close. I will have to exchange it for an XXL so, back in the bag it went.

Next, I got him a Broncos Calendar . It looked nice and big. The trouble was the pictures of each player were huge but the numbers on each page telling you the month and day were very small. He could not even see the numbers! I was getting embarrassed—two out of three were no good so I gave the calendar to one of my favorite staff people and I will try to buy a better one with BIG numbers.

Last but not least—I got him a really nice desk lamp to use with his device to use with his Google Earth, Emails, to research info, etc. I was *very* excited to have found this Hi-tech lamp that also looks classy and manly.

So, we removed the parts, put it together, following directions 100%. He plugged it in and, of course, guess what, it did not light up! We called the maintenance man here who knows about all that stuff. He played with it a good half hour. Nothing!

That blasted lamp I was so happy to give was defective! Now, I ask you—how could a mechanical device in a sealed box from the factory be defective?!?!

So, picture this. Here we were—standing in a room full of gifts that didn't work, didn't fit, could not read. Luckily, I had a picture of me framed for him so I did give that to him. Of course, I will just bet you when we mount it on the wall, the frame will come apart and the picture will tear as it hits the floor.

Oh well, it is the thought that counts, right? I did give them all with the best intentions!

### **IV. TIME IS OUR GIFT—TO GIVE AND RECEIVE**

“The best intentions.” That rings of something *else* we hear in this season. Today, we mark a momentous threshold—as the calendar year converges with the sacred seasons. The gift-giving of Christmas, celebrated this week as we move into the Magi coming in homage with treasures at Epiphany, finds us here today at a holy intersection of time—the New Year.

And on this pinnacle day, we look back at the year—reflecting on what has been—giving thanks for the gifts it has brought us, as we also grieve the difficulties and loss. We offer all to God as a prayer—of thanksgiving and letting go. The year past saw much loss—deaths of our loved ones—human and fur-babies; actors and writers and artists and poets. Inspirational leaders and police officers, firefighters and soldiers.

And, as we continue to honor what has been, we look forward to what will be—with purpose and intention. “The best intentions” might look like New Year’s Resolutions. Or, they might look like new lenses—as we look for God in new and unexpected places; recognize God’s presence and activity in our lives and how God may be leading us in new directions. Or, listen to God speaking with new ears.

On this day, we are presented with the best gift of all—Time. A new year; a fresh start, a clean slate.

What is now the time *for*? For you? For your community, your family? Your purpose?

Mary Oliver famously asks:

“Tell me, what is it you plan to do  
with your one wild and precious life?”

What will you and I do with our one precious *year*?

## **V. VOICES OF POSSIBILITY**

Some wise voices and images around us speak to this question.

### **A. Sunrise, Sunset: Happy New Year 2017**

Rev. Jake Joseph, pastor at Ft. Collins UCC—young and newly ordained and married this year—and wise beyond his years, writes to his congregation:

Dear Plymouth,  
New Years is not a religious holiday as far as the official Church Calendar is concerned, but in some way it is the most religious of all times. It is a moment, at the strike of midnight, when we ponder meaning, purpose, the use of the time we have had, and set new aspirations for the time we have left.

It might not be officially religious, but New Years is deeply personal and spiritual. **We wish each other a “happy new year!” This is as much a prayer as an expression of goodwill and celebration.** It is also a wish for our own lives.

This year, think deeply about what time means to you. Think about what you want from your time. Jesus says he will *always* be with us even until the end of time. How does that comfort or unsettle you? And as you wish others, a “happy new year,” remember that you are saying a prayer of blessing on them for their time and for yours.

I wish you all a happy new year!

### **B. Generational Gifts**

Time itself is a gift. Our lifetime, and the lifetimes ours touch are gifts all of themselves. So much more precious than gold, silver, or anything we can hold in our hands. Unless it’s a baby!

Look at this photo on the screen.

The photo was shared by a young woman named Sarah, who had brought her two-week-old daughter Kaylee, to meet her 101-year-old Grandma Rosa.

The photo inspired hundreds of people post their own multigenerational photos and reflect on the circle of life in new and profound ways. This picture represents a “generation gap” of 101 years! Others even stretched it to 112 years.

People from all over the world have been sharing their pictures and stories of the generations, and it has inspired many to reflect on life and time more deeply. Said the founders of the site: “People were really drawn to the image for reasons we didn’t foresee. They thought of all of the things this woman has seen and lived through in her lifetime and imagined how her experiences will shape the life of the baby just starting her own journey.”

“To think that folks grew up in entirely different worlds than what the newest babies will experience, yet their influence, values and love will pass on through them and others to come is simply amazing.”

Grandma Rosa, our gal here in the photo, was born on June 13, 1913 on Friday the 13th. She was the youngest of two children and had an older brother. Rosa has three children, five grandchildren and 10 great-grandchildren and currently lives with her oldest daughter in Chandler, AZ.

“My grandma was born and raised in Michigan where she spent all her life until 2007 when she moved to Arizona. She went to school in a one-room school house. Her dad was the first one in their town to own a vehicle. She went back to college when she was 43 and became a school teacher in Michigan.”

A life and time brought forward and now passed on in love to this new life.

### **C. WHAT'S YOUR "GROWING EDGE"**

— Civil Rights theologian Howard Thurman penned these words many years ago, but they are most fitting today as we launch into a new year and a new growing edge in our lives and spirits:

#### *The Growing Edge*

Look well to the growing edge! All around us worlds are dying and new worlds are being born; all around us life is dying and life is being born. The fruit ripens on the tree, the roots are silently at work in the darkness of the earth against a time when there shall be new leaves, fresh blossoms, green fruit.

Such is the growing edge! It is the extra breath from the exhausted lung, the one more thing to try when all else has failed, the upward reach of life when weariness closes in upon all endeavor.

This is the basis of hope in moments of despair, the incentive to carry on when times are out of joint and men have lost

their reason, the source of confidence when worlds crash and dreams whiten into ash. The birth of the child — life's most dramatic answer to death — this is the growing edge incarnate. Look well to the growing edge!

### **D. BEGINNER'S MIND AND BABIES' EYES**

Parker Palmer, reflecting on Thurman's urging offers us this New Year's day:

I'm heading into 2017 aspiring to look at life through the eyes of a child. Buddhists call it "beginner's mind"—a corrective to the cynicism that comes when we let hard realities darken our vision and diminish our imagination.

It's a way of looking at the world that doesn't deny the darkness, but makes fresh starts possible in *everything*—from our personal to our political lives. What's "the growing edge" in your life? Whatever it is, may 2017 be a year in which our adult powers dance with our child-like imaginations to help make all things new.”

### **VI. NOW IS THE TIME**

Now is the time. A joyous and profound time in the cycle of the year, the years, and our lives.

What gifts will this new year bring? What gifts will WE bring to this new year? Will they fit? Be fitting? Or kind of awkwardly hang in the closet?

What gifts does this new year hold for us—in the eyes and hearts of each other—from the most precious, wise elder, to the innocent, imaginative child?

This new year is truly a Gift. What will we do with this most wild and precious gift?

Amen.