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Call to Worship

Once again, we gather across a distance of virtual space and time, bound together with God's Spirit.

We are many scattered across the land, and yet, we are one in the Spirit of God, who created all humanity as part of God's family.

In this different time, maybe you find yourself busy and anxious, or maybe you find peace in your aloneness.

However you are experiencing this time of global crisis, know that God is with you and all of us as we come together and worship, trusting Christ in times of joy and despair.

Prayer & Lord's Prayer

Our minds have begun to blur during this time of crisis, God, for time has seemed to stop. We've begun to lose track of time, not knowing the day of week or the hour of day, for one day of restlessness runs into the next. Confusion grips our minds as fear wraps around our hearts.

And yet, we find moments of hope as we discover new ways to reach out to one another. No longer can we offer hugs or handshakes, but we strive to extend your hope and love, God, into the world. May you inspire us to find creative ways to remain connected as a church, to reach out in safe ways to remind us that we're all in this together.

We bring our prayers...

- For the health care workers who face the possibility of being infected...
- For the homeless who have nowhere to shelter or to isolate themselves...
- For those who have lost their jobs and their income and wonder how long their savings will last...

As we grieve and sense the pains of the world, we still trust in Jesus, who taught us to pray:

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us. Lead us not into temptation,

**but deliver us from evil, for thine is the kingdom,
the power, and the glory forever. Amen.**

Scripture: Ecclesiastes 3:1-8

There's a season for everything
and a time for every matter
under the heavens:
² a time for giving birth
and a time for dying,
 a time for planting and a time for
uprooting what was planted,
³ a time for killing and a time for healing,
 a time for tearing down
and a time for building up,
⁴ a time for crying and a time for laughing,
 a time for mourning
and a time for dancing,
⁵ a time for throwing stones
and a time for gathering stones,
 a time for embracing
and a time for avoiding embraces,
⁶ a time for searching
and a time for losing,
 a time for keeping
and a time for throwing away,
⁷ a time for tearing
and a time for repairing,
 a time for keeping silent
and a time for speaking,
⁸ a time for loving and a time for hating,
 a time for war and a time for peace.

Reflection

I've always had a fascination with clocks, especially with how they worked. When I was around 12 years old, I wanted to know how a wind-up alarm clock worked, so I took it apart. When I encountered the main spring, it uncoiled all over the floor. That was my first lesson on how I could not put some things back together again.

During high school I found an old schoolhouse clock in the attic of our garage. The aged finish had darkened and hid the natural color of the wood, but through the kind instruction of an older man staying at my grandparent's Parkside Motel in Goshen, I learned how to strip and refinish the antique clock. That began my passion for refinishing antique clocks, with my latest project working on a clock found when cleaning out my uncle's house after he died. The clock had been a wedding gift to my grandparents, which someone had painted over. After stripping away the paint, the beauty of the original wood came alive.

We humans seem to have a natural desire to measure time, from our biological clocks that sense time in relation to the rising and setting of the sun, to our mechanical and digital clocks that measure time or an atomic clock that can measure time so accurately that it would only lose one second in 33 billion years.¹

Often, we measure time as a way to be sure we get everything done, and sometimes we feel so busy that we wonder if we have time for everything, as one father experienced in his busy fast-paced life when he found himself working from home.

His four-year-old daughter had acquired a fixation for the story *The Three Little Pigs* and wanted him to read it to her night after night. Being a very busy person, the father thought of a way to provide the story and create more time for working at home. He recorded himself reading the story.

When his daughter next asked for this story, the father simply switched on the playback. This worked for a couple of nights, but then one evening the little girl pushed the storybook toward her father.

“Now, honey,” he said, “I have lots to do for work, and you know how to turn on the recording of the story by yourself.”

“Yes,” she said, “but I can’t sit on its lap!”²

There is a time for everything, especially time to draw near to those we love and a time for offering comfort during this world crisis of the coronavirus.

The writer of the biblical book of Ecclesiastes was also fascinated by the idea of time for everything—not due to refinishing antique clocks, but because he wondered about the purpose of life. Have you ever wondered about the meaning of life?

On the one hand, this Teacher suggested that life is pointless, that there’s nothing new under the sun, that all our hard work is futile, for we all end up dead.

On the other hand, he offered an inspiring poem about time—suggesting there is a time for everything, giving birth and dying, planting and harvesting, crying and laughing, mourning and dancing, silence and speaking. We’ve all experienced these seemingly opposite times of life,

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when life seems filled with joy and those times we enter despair. Having a time for everything ties us together in our humanity, for none of us escape times of struggle, and we all seek moments of joy. But a time for everything, really? Even a deadly virus?

In a sense, this coronavirus is teaching us as well, that we're all connected as one human family. The virus treats everyone the same—whether citizen or immigrant, dark skinned or light, rich or poor, gay or straight, female or male, homeless or sheltered, Democrat or Republican. This virus doesn't care who we are. We're all in this together.

There is a time for everything, and I suggest it's time for us to shine forth, to see what's at the core of our being, the natural goodness that God has planted deep within us. Just as I learned to remove the cracked varnish of antique clocks, God can remove our faded varnish to reveal the loving nature of our lives that comes from God.

Rather than focusing only on the despair of this time we have entered, find time for silence, for

laughter, for planting seeds of hope, for dancing, for peace. Maybe we could even view this time of being apart from one another as a Sabbath, as a time for rest in the midst of the chaos, as poet Lynn Ungar so well expressed when she wrote on March 11 a poem entitled "Pandemic."³

What if you thought of it
as the Jews consider the Sabbath—
the most sacred of times?
Cease from travel.
Cease from buying and selling.
Give up, just for now,
on trying to make the world
different than it is.
Sing. Pray. Touch only those
to whom you commit your life.
Center down.

And when your body has become still,
reach out with your heart.
Know that we are connected
in ways that are terrifying and beautiful.
(You could hardly deny it now.)
Know that our lives
are in one another's hands.
(Surely, that has come clear.)

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Do not reach out your hands.
Reach out your heart.
Reach out your words.
Reach out all the tendrils
of compassion that move, invisibly,
where we cannot touch.

Promise this world your love—
for better or for worse,
in sickness and in health,
so long as we all shall live.

Invitation to Virtual Offering & Prayer

There is a time for everything, a time for giving and
a time for holding on. As we gather for our virtual

offering, some may have less to give due to losing
their jobs, and our hearts go out to you. You remain
a part of our family and our prayers. For those who
continue to have an income or savings, we celebrate
the gifts you can provide.

Blessing

There is a time for everything, so may you take time
this week to sit in silence, to sense God's presence
as you sit in God's lap, and to know that we will get
through this together.

¹ <https://abcnews.go.com/Technology/worlds-accurate-clock-now/story?id=64877303>

² Hodgins, Michael. *1002 Humorous Illustrations for Public Speaking: Fresh, Timely, Compelling Illustrations for Preachers, Teachers, and Speakers* (Kindle Locations 975-980). Zondervan. Kindle Edition, #27, adapted.

³ www.lynnungar.com/poems/pandemic/