

**There is a time for everything – New Year’s Day 2012**  
**Meditation on Ecclesiastes 3: 1-8**

Sisters and brothers,  
I don’t know what you thought and felt when you heard those famous words from the Old Testament book of Ecclesiastes just a moment ago... They could be like water poured out as wine on such a day of new beginnings, hopes, dreams and promises.  
Some of the verses are happy, some very serious, some even sad.

There is a time for everything –  
a time to be born just as much as a time to die...  
That is how the long list of events begins.

There is a time for everything –  
not only for laughing but also for weeping,  
not only for mourning but also for dancing.  
There is a time to embrace and a time to let go,  
a time to search and a time to give up,  
a time to tear down and a time to build up,  
a time to love – and a time to hate.

... a time for just everything.

Wouldn’t it be enough to have just half of all that?  
The nice and easy, the beautiful half?  
Planting, healing, building, loving and laughing,  
embracing ... and peace?  
These sound so appropriate for the first morning of a new year; they fit the hopes and the peace of the day, the visions of the future and dreams for tomorrow. Plans for life painted in bright colours...

With the words from Ecclesiastes,  
we have invited a poet to our time of reflection and celebration this morning.

The colours in which this Old Testament poet paints  
are strong and sometimes wild.  
His colours are full of power and contrast.  
Besides beaming colours and dazzling light,  
there are also the blacks and dark greys  
of mourning, weeping, dying and war.

The poet describes life in all its fullness:  
his picture is colourful and exciting –  
and what is even more: utterly honest.

He doesn't pretend or promise what life cannot sustain.  
...no bed of roses or garden of paradise,  
but a bit of everything:  
beauty and anger,  
joy and pain,  
hope and disappointment,  
tears and tenderness...

This is life. Real life.  
And we know that.  
We all know it.  
We can't always live on the bright side.  
We have to suffer pain, and can't avoid loss...

And wisdom, true wisdom, is to accept it all,  
embrace it, come to terms with it, live with it, love it.  
Love life in all its fullness... in bright times and dark times.

To live both sides of our Old Testament poet's words  
is part of being human:  
loving and hating,  
building and tearing,  
killing and healing.  
The beauty of life lies in the changes, the ups and downs.  
A beauty, you may ask, that contains suffering?  
Is that what we want?  
Suffer, accept, endure – is that what we dream of?

Maybe it's not the stuff our dreams are made of,  
but it is truly and honestly the stuff of our reality.  
There is a time for everything,  
and a season for every activity under heaven.  
There is a time to weep and a time to laugh,  
a time to mourn and a time to dance...

There is no absolute safety in life,  
no ultimate control,  
no guarantee of paradise.  
Nobody can spend his or her whole life on the sunny side of the street.  
There are always the shadows of loss, illness, pain and struggle.  
They are part of being human.  
There is fear and war and death –  
that is part of our existence...  
part of life,

part of our relationships.  
But none of that need reduce our strength for life,  
it only makes us grow –  
grow strong, wise and whole.

We all know well  
that one cannot hold fast to happiness and joy at any price.  
But we can hold fast to our wishes and hopes.  
We can have them,  
share them, express them, dare to realise them – every single day.  
There is no guarantee of success.  
We can hurt each other.  
We are vulnerable to hurt, and uncertain...  
but this seems to be the fertile ground in which love can grow.

Love happens across the whole wide range of human life:  
There is a time to be born and a time to die,  
a time to plant and a time to uproot,  
a time to kill and a time to heal,  
a time to weep and a time to laugh,  
a time to tear and a time to mend,  
a time to love and a time to hate,  
a time for war and a time for peace...  
...in every single life under God's heaven.

Love blossoms within being born and dying,  
within weeping and laughing,  
within embracing and letting go.  
Love blossoms when you speak and when you are silent,  
when you sleep and when you wake...

So, may we all learn to love both:  
the dark side and the bright side of our life.  
May we paint the picture of our life in the New Year  
in all the colours of the rainbow  
and allow blacks and greys to add to the excitement and the fascination of  
it all.  
May we paint full of hope and happiness.  
Full of peace and joy.  
Full of sunlight...- against the storms that are bound to come.

And whenever there is the experience of hurt, may there also be healing.  
Whenever we have to shed tears, may there always be laughter as well.  
Whenever we face loss, may there always be something new to be born.

Whenever we mourn, may there always be somebody to take us by the hand and invite us to dance.

May we know how long to gather stones, and when to scatter them.  
May we always know how long to be angry, and then discover how to transform passionate anger into the mighty power of love.

There is a time to love and a time to hate,  
a time for war and a time for peace.  
And may the peace always be at the end of it all...  
God's peace - that passes our understanding and fills our lives with beauty and healing. Amen.