

## MAKING ALL THINGS NEW

by Rev. Susan Morrison

New Year's Day

January 1, 2006

### **Ecclesiastes 3:1-8**

For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven: <sup>2</sup>a time to be born, and a time to die; a time to plant, and a time to pluck up what is planted; <sup>3</sup>a time to kill, and a time to heal; a time to break down, and a time to build up; <sup>4</sup>a time to weep, and a time to laugh; a time to mourn, and a time to dance; <sup>5</sup>a time to throw away stones, and a time to gather stones together; a time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing; <sup>6</sup>a time to seek, and a time to lose; a time to keep, and a time to throw away; <sup>7</sup>a time to tear, and a time to sew; a time to keep silence, and a time to speak; <sup>8</sup>a time to love, and a time to hate; a time for war, and a time for peace.

### **Galatians 4:4-7**

<sup>4</sup>But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth Jesus, born of a woman, born under the Law, <sup>5</sup>in order to redeem those who were under the Law, so that we might receive adoption as children. <sup>6</sup>And because you are children, God has sent the Spirit of the Child into our hearts, crying, "Abba! Father!" <sup>7</sup>So you are no longer slaves, but daughters and sons! And if you're daughters and sons, you're also heirs, by God's design.

### **Revelation 21:1-6**

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. <sup>2</sup>And I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. <sup>3</sup>And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "See, the home of God is among mortals. God will dwell with them as their God; they will be God's peoples, and God will be with them; <sup>4</sup> God will wipe every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more; mourning and crying and pain will be no more, for the first things have passed away." <sup>5</sup>And the One who was seated on the throne said, "See, I am making all things new." And added, "Write this, for these words are trustworthy and true." <sup>6</sup>And that One continued, "It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. To the thirsty I will give water as a gift from the spring of the water of life."

\*\*\*\*\*

For everything there IS a season. The older and wiser we grow, the more we seem to both appreciate and accept this truth. The writer of Ecclesiastes is known for the wisdom of his words and Leo Toleos certainly did justice to the wisdom of these verses when he preached on them last October. The inevitability of life's cycle – birth and death, planting and reaping, laughing and crying, dancing and mourning – are all held in the hands of God who created us and loves us through all seasons.

The lesson seems particularly apt on this New Year's Sunday because it reminds us that today is a time for new beginnings. It is a time to take inventory of our lives, especially of our relationship with God, and decide what we want to change, what New Year's resolutions we want to make for

the new year.

But this lesson also informs our other two readings this morning. Because there is a time, a season for everything, it reminds us that God knew what God was doing when God sent the Beloved Jesus to earth. For God there was the right time to send God's self into the world to redeem the world. That is what Paul writes to the Christians in Galatia in our Epistle Lesson this morning. "When the fullness of time had come, God sent forth Jesus, born of a woman and born under the Law in order to redeem those who were under the Law." Paul goes on to suggest that before Christ's birth, Jews and Gentiles alike were in slavery. They were enslaved by the powers and principalities of their day. They were enslaved by many of the same idols that we worship in our day and age – materialism, violence, sexual promiscuity, and the worshipping of false gods. But with the birth of Jesus, the Word made flesh, Emmanuel – God with us – everything changed. God provided a way for them to be free of the enslaving powers and principalities of evil and to be free to renew a right relationship with their Creator. Women and men became God's own adopted daughters and sons through the gift of Jesus.

Christmas is full of wonderful stories of how the coming of Jesus Christ transforms life. For everything there is a season, and the season of Christmas reminds us of the possibility of new beginnings in our own lives if only we choose to accept Jesus as the One who shares our plight and looses our chains and offers us salvation here, now as well as for eternity.

Can there be Christmas without watching or at least remembering Frank Capra's *It's a Wonderful Life*? with Jimmy Stewart playing George Bailey and Donna Reed as Mary Bailey, his wife. Due to a string of difficult circumstances, we meet George on Christmas Eve, a man thoroughly depressed and disheartened by the catastrophes of the day. Fearing disgrace because the Bailey Building and Loan Company is about to close due to the misplacement of an \$8000 loan and the machinations of the evil millionaire, Mr. Potter, George is broken and suicidal. Responding to the prayers of folks from Bedford Falls, God sends Clarence Oddbody, Angel Second Class, on a mission to earth to save the life of George Bailey and in the process to earn his angel wings. It all happens in the middle of the town bridge overlooking the icy river below. Before George jumps to his death, an odd, elderly stranger hurtles himself into the swirling icy water. George instinctively jumps in after him, forgetting for a moment that he had been contemplating killing himself just seconds before. They are both pulled from the water by the tollhouse keeper and Clarence, the wingless angel, proceeds to review George's life, showing him what life would have been like for others and for his beloved hometown if he had never been born. Concludes Clarence, "You see, George, you've really had a wonderful life. Don't you see what a mistake it would be to throw it away?" George is convinced and converted. Like a transformed Scrooge, George Bailey embraces family and friends and life itself with new appreciation and joy.

The little bell on the Bailey's Christmas tree begins to tinkle as it sways back and forth. Only George realizes the full significance of the bell ringing – it rings for Clarence who has earned his angel wings by succeeding with a tough assignment. It also rings for George whose life has been transformed through Divine intervention. He is no longer slave to his problems and flaws and shame. God has freed him and given him abundant life. For everything there is a season, and this was the season, the right time for George's redemption.

Years ago this story took on new meaning. I had been called to the bedside of a 34 year old woman who was dying of leukemia. I had met Sharon during my appointment at Ballardvale United Church in Andover. At the time, she was a sophomore at Mt Holyoke when she was first diagnosed with Hodgkins.. She won the battle.

Years later, I was at her bedside once again – this time with her fiancé Benton Armstrong. Again she won the battle after a bone marrow transplant and months of harsh treatment. I officiated at their wedding. You can imagine, it was a triumph of life and love. Seven years later I was again called to her bedside. This time Sharon had decided to take that eternal journey into the light of God since her body could no longer sustain life. She did not want to put her beloved family and friends through the agony of watching her linger and suffer. We talked about death and life after death. Sharon spelled her thoughts on a magnetic letter board since she was on a respirator and unable to communicate verbally.

I asked Sharon if she would send me a sign after death, acknowledging that what we anticipated about eternal life was, in fact, true. She began to spell out on her magnetic letter board the word “bell” and then something about “wonderful life.” Yes! Yes! everyone understood. *It’s a Wonderful Life* was a family Christmas favorite. “Every time you hear a bell it means some angel just got its wings” said Benton. Sharon spelled out that she would be his guardian angel forever. The ringing of the bell would be Sharon’s sign that she had earned her wings. At her funeral I rang this bell. And I explained the story to everyone and reminded family and friends that the ringing of the bell not only signified her passage from life to eternal life: it also signified that Sharon’s living and dying was an awakening to all of us of the preciousness of life and that it would be her wish that we all embraced the fullness of life and love, much as George Bailey did when he finally realized that it IS a wonderful life. I keep this bell in my study in a place where I am sure to see it every day. It reminds me that for everything there is a season – a time to be born and a time to die - AND that Jesus came that I might have life – a wonderful, abundant life. Appreciating the preciousness of every day, no matter what the circumstances, is the lesson of this bell.

With the birth of Jesus on Christmas it is as if there is a new heaven and a new earth. God has been born among us. The home of God is among mortals. God is with us and we are God’s people. “See,” says God. “I am making all things new.” It is up to us to receive this extraordinary gift and to let the Holy Child, the Savior of the World, make all things new for us – again and again and again. I wish you the ringing of the bells this New Years Day. May the sound of the bell remind you that even for you, God is making all things new. Alleluia! Amen!