

You kind of get to feeling sorry for Qoaleth, our teacher, as you read the first couple chapters of Ecclesiastes. We read the first chapter last week.

Everything to him seemed meaningless...all is vanity and a chasing after wind. That's his mantra.

In the second chapter, he continues his project to find something...anything... with meaning. He decides pleasure is the next thing to try. He drank wine and ate delicious food. He chased after pleasure anywhere he could find it. He denied himself nothing. He built houses and fine gardens. He amassed wealth. He had male and female singers to entertain him, and a harem to amuse him sexually,

But in the end, that too was all vanity and a chasing after wind.

Then he turned to wisdom. He worked to gain as much wisdom as possible. He decided wisdom was better than folly, but in the end it really didn't matter because both the wise and the foolish die. It's all vanity and a chasing after wind.

That brings us to today's reading....so I hated life he says. Whether he worked or played, whether he sought to be wise or foolish, whether he built great things and did great things, it all seemed meaningless.

We all die and then everything you work for goes to someone else. It's all vanity and chasing after wind.

So is that all there is to life? An endless chase after meaningless stuff until we die? An endless sea of unsatisfying sameness? That's the stuff depression is made of.

But then, in verse 24, there's a shift. Now Qoaleth says, People can do nothing better than eat and drink and find satisfaction in their work.

But wait a minute. Earlier, he'd made the conclusion that was impossible – it was all vanity and chasing after wind...meaningless.

But then comes the difference – Qoaleth goes on, This I see is from the hand of God. For who can find enjoyment without God?

It's about getting our vision right. In the beginning of the book, Qoaleth talks about all this seeking after greatness, pleasure, wealth, or wisdom as his life's ultimate goal. He's trying to find ultimate meaning in the things that he can do.

As long as we are looking for the meaning of life in the things we do, it never quite satisfies...it is chasing after wind.

But when we see everything as a gift from God and every moment infused by God, then the same things that seemed meaningless and hollow before, suddenly bring deep joy.

Eating and drinking to find ultimate enjoyment and satisfaction just makes us eat and drink too much. The food and drink never seem to fill that emptiness, and on top of it, we feel bad for being a glutton or a drunkard.

But, when we appreciate eating and drinking, especially with those we love, as a gift from God, we can truly celebrate those moments...we can truly feel like we've been fed.

We work and work and work but too often never feel like we've accomplished enough or earned enough.

But when we stop using our work to find our ultimate purpose, and instead view it as God given, then we begin to see how God's purpose might be served by our work. Even if your work isn't something you find much joy in, being able to stay present to the moment can keep you from missing the small joys that come along the way.

How much human misery is caused by this endless rat race of seeking after more and more and more only to find that whatever we're after never quite satisfies us? We end up waiting for something better to come along...something that will finally get us where we want to be.

That perfect relationship...perfect job...perfect body...more money...retirement.

When we are focused on some imagined future, we miss the joy of the present moment...and we miss God's presence in that moment. Because that's where God is found...in the ordinary moments in our lives...in our ordinary time with our families and friends...in the ordinary moments of our work, whether at home or in a paid or volunteer job.

That brings us to perhaps one of the most famous and most beloved passages in all of scripture. And the only one I know of to be made into a rock and roll song that wasn't specifically Christian rock. I put a link to the song, Turn, turn, turn, by the Byrds, on my Facebook page and the church Facebook pages.

To everything there is a season...

This passage captures what we know is deeply true about life...it has its seasons and it has its times. Life goes on in endless cycles of birth and death, joy and sorrow, war and peace, a time to be silent and a time to speak.

And sometimes, the time for one will be smack in the middle of a time for its opposite. 2018 was for me a time for a lot of the painful halves of each of these pairs. It was the year Sam was sick and the year my mom died.

So much of the year was a time for weeping and mourning and death. But what I came to realize was that even in the midst of all that, there were still moments of joy...those God infused moments that take you by surprise. That let you say, this year might be terrible, but this moment right now is not.

We can still find laughter in the midst of struggle and pain and joy in the midst of sadness.

When Sam was at our house recovering after the hospital, he had a home health nurse coming regularly. This was obviously a difficult time, especially for Sam, but really for all of us...a time of dressing changes and tube flushes, tube feeding, IV feeding, drainage tubes, pain management, temperature taking, and so on.

Sam's home health nurse became worried at one visit that he was dehydrated. After a phone conversation with the doctors at UNMC, she sent us to the ER. Sam was also almost out of morphine and asked for a small refill to get him through to his next appointment.

After some IV fluids and a conversation to convince the ER doc he wasn't a drug addict, we got the prescription and the discharge instructions.

Only the discharge instructions had a typo – instead of saying continue the morphine, it said continue morphing...m.o.r.p.h.i.n.g. Sam pointed it out to me and I said, so it all comes back to the Power Rangers.

See when Erica and Sam were little, they went through a several year Power Ranger phase...they watched the show, they had the costumes. Their friends did too, so each color of Power Ranger was represented when they played. Sam was the red one and Erica I think yellow. If you know the power rangers, you know they're ordinary kids until a crisis arises. Then they morph into their super hero status.

Anyway, morphing made us laugh...me rather hysterically as only the ER at 1 am can do. Sam not as much because it hurt to laugh too much.

But that laughter in the midst of an ordeal that was decidedly unfunny felt really quite healing. God brings us those moments.

I'm not sure what you would call this time in our history...maybe a time to uproot things that need uprooting...we're asked to refrain from embracing. It's a time of more weeping than laughing and more tearing than mending. It seems like it's more a time of breaking down than building up.

But even still, all these moments are infused with God's presence. They are infused with the presence of a God who suffers with us in our weeping, and in our mourning.

God is present in the moments when old ways of doing things are being broken down.

But it doesn't stop there. In Christ, God turns our mourning into dancing, God turns our sorrow into joy. God heals and mends that which is broken.

And the God who came that we might have life and have it abundantly is even now, bringing new birth out of death.