

**Pilgrim Church of Duxbury
January 2, 2017
Rev. Peggy O'Connor
Ecclesiastes 3:1-8
When the Confetti Settles**

Today we stand, at the threshold of the New Year. The first step over the threshold happened last night, but we stand this morning with the heels of our shoes still touching it. The New Year is that new.

The Babylonians were the first to celebrate the turning of the year in about 2000 BC. Their New Year was the first day of spring, which makes more sense than the dead of winter. But their ancient logic was ignored by the Romans, who changed it to January 1st, in 46 BC. Ever since then, this is when the world has celebrated the New Year, except for early Christians, who were forbidden to celebrate the holiday until the early 1600's. This was because New Year's celebrations were closely tied to the Roman god Janus, and so the early church thought it was too pagan a celebration.

Janus, the highest god in the Roman pantheon of gods, was the god of beginnings, time, doorways, and endings. He symbolized change, transitions and the progress of past to future. He had two faces, one looking ahead, the other looking back. He could see the past & the future at the same time.

In one way, we continue to celebrate Janus at the New Year. We understand it to be a new beginning; a time of transition and change; an ending and a beginning. So, we make New Year's resolutions.

Once the confetti settles many sit down to make their New Year's resolutions. According to Wikipedia, the most popular resolutions are: to lose weight, exercise more, quit smoking, drink less alcohol, get out of debt, get a better job, go back to or do better in school, get more organized, reduce stress, and volunteer to help others. All these are great goals. They are full of hope that things will be better... we will be better...in the New Year.

What we have not carried forward from Janus, is the connection to the past that the future must have to be grounded. Only by looking at the past can we hope not to repeat our mistakes. We have erased Janus' backward looking face and in doing so we are the poorer for it, especially as people of faith.

Our passage today, from the Book of Ecclesiastes, is well known mostly because of Pete Seeger's song, Turn! Turn! Turn! which took the passage word for word from the King James version of the Bible, then added the words, turn, turn, turn, twice into the first line of the passage and used it as a refrain. This change is significant and why I mention the song. By adding three turns, Seeger returned the piece of New Year we have lost. The need for us to turn...to look forward and back like Janus... as we step in to the New Year; to look at the past as we plan the future; to see who we were as we consider who we want to be 2017.

This ancient concept may sound a bit New Agey, but it is just as religious a notion today as it was in Rome...especially for Christians. Just a week ago,

we celebrated Christmas, the birth of Jesus. However, Christmas is much more than a story about a baby born in a stable who is visited by shepherds. As amazing as the Christmas story is, the meaning of Christmas is more amazing. And sometimes we forget this.

Christmas, above all else, is the celebration of the incarnation. Easy to say but what does that mean. It is when God became flesh, assuming human nature by coming in the form of a baby. Our faith tells us that Jesus is the only incarnation of God and that he came into the world on a unique mission. He is not a representative figure of God like a statue. He is not a messenger from God like an angel. He is the incarnation of God.

This and all theological concepts have a way of giving people brain cramps. They make you squint a lot. You think you get the point, then it slips away. They are like pictures which look like one thing but can also look like another. It is hard to see the image you don't see first.

The incarnation is something we get but then again don't. We know it is important but we cannot hold onto it long enough to know what to do with it. So, we celebrate of the birth of a baby. It is easier. What would help would be to practice a little Roman theology and keep looking back to the Incarnation.

You see, the incarnation allows us to get to know God and to learn how to live our lives as followers of Jesus Christ. In other words, the incarnation gives us the opportunity to open ourselves to God...and offers us chance to

be transformed. This is what happened to the shepherds. They were transformed from men with the dirtiest and least respected job into evangelists, all because they accepted the invitation to witness and be a part of the incarnation of God.

We too are offered this invitation. We are invited, through the incarnation, to open ourselves to God and be transformed. But, if we limit Christmas to being a seasonal story, then we omit the possibility for the incarnation to touch us.

So, let's turn, turn, turn this New Year. Let's look back at Christmas throughout 2017, not as a story but as our touchstone, our guiding light, and our hope. Let's use the story to remind ourselves to follow the light of Christ so that we too may be transformed into His faithful people.

What would that mean for you? More patient...more kind...more present? Would you change your priorities? Would you buy more or give more? Would you do less of something and more of something else? Would you let go of old hurts and anger? Would you forgive or ask for forgiveness?

As you came in this morning you were given a slip of paper, an envelope and a pen or pencil. Please take these out and for the next few minutes make a list of what you want to change...what you want to do more of...what you want to do less of in 2017.

When you have finished, put your list in the envelope, seal it, and address it to yourself. Then during the offering, give your envelope to who

will be circulating through the sanctuary. We will mail these out in six months so you will remember and have a chance to recommit yourself to your hopes for personal transformation through the power of the incarnation.

To everything - turn, turn, turn
There is a season - turn, turn, turn
And a time to every purpose under heaven

A time to be born, a time to die
A time to plant, a time to reap
A time to kill, a time to heal
A time to laugh, a time to weep

To everything - turn, turn, turn
There is a season - turn, turn, turn
And a time to every purpose under heaven

A time to build up, a time to break down
A time to dance, a time to mourn
A time to cast away stones
A time to gather stones together

To everything - turn, turn, turn
There is a season - turn, turn, turn
And a time to every purpose under heaven

A time of love, a time of hate
A time of war, a time of peace
A time you may embrace
A time to refrain from embracing

To everything - turn, turn, turn
There is a season - turn, turn, turn
And a time to every purpose under heaven

A time to gain, a time to lose
A time to rend, a time to sew
A time for love, a time for hate
A time for peace, I swear it's not too late!