

**Haydenville Congregational Church**  
**The Rev. Dr. Andrea Ayvazian**  
**January 2, 2011**  
**Ecclesiastes 3:1-13**

**“For everything there is a season...”**

*May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts  
be acceptable in thy sight, O Lord Our Strength and Our Redeemer. Amen.*

Justin Aaberg, Cody Barker, Asher Brown, Seth Walsh, Raymond Chase, Tyler Clementi and Billy Lucas. All gay youth who were taunted and bullied and took their own lives because they could not imagine a better future.

This past September, Dan Savage, a 46-year old syndicated columnist, was on a flight to New York and he could not stop thinking about Billy Lucas, a 15 year-old from Indiana who committed suicide on September 9. Savage, who had read that Billy had been bullied at school for being gay, found himself wishing that he could have spoken to Billy and told him “hang in there, hold on, it gets better.”

For years Dan Savage, himself gay, had given talks at colleges. But he was never invited into middle or high schools—precisely where so many LGBT adolescents are taunted. But after Billy Lucas’ death, Savage realized he did not have to wait for invitations to middle and high schools. In an era of YouTube, Twitter and Facebook, Savage realized he could speak to LGBT youth directly. And so the “It Gets Better” project began.

On September 21, Dan Savage and his husband posted an on-line a video telling gay youth facing harassment that they should hold on and believe they are whole, healthy and loved—*it gets better* was the main message.

Since that first video, the It Gets Better Project has turned into a worldwide movement inspiring over 5,000 user-created videos and over 15 million viewers. There are videos from celebrities, organizations, activists, politicians and media personalities including Barack Obama, Hillary Clinton, Nancy Pelosi, Adam Lambert, Colin Farrell, Ellen DeGeneres and many more.

It is deeply moving to click on the “It Gets Better” website and see President Obama talk about his own struggles growing up feeling “different” and hearing

him encourage LGBT youth to hold on, "...a whole world is out there waiting for you" he says staring at the camera. Hillary Clinton says with her no-nonsense approach and authoritative voice, "Tomorrow will be better. It gets better."

The most popular video features Joel Burns, a Fort Worth city councilman, who read his testimony at a City Council meeting and was filmed. Choking back tears, Councilman Burns recalls being roughed up in high school by older kids who told him that he should die and go to hell where he belonged.

The thousands of videos now part of the "It's Get Better" project are all about time. Gay men and lesbians look into the camera and say, we faced what you are facing in our past, but it is better now. It was bad, but it gets better. Time has passed, we have grown up. Time will make things easier for you. You will find love, you will be safe, it gets better. Heterosexual allies look into the camera and talk about how the society is changing, painfully, slowly inch by inch, but change is happening and life for LGBT youth and adults is improving. They too look into the camera and say, "it gets better."

The "It Gets Better" project is all about the passage of time. Time: that elusive, mysterious, intangible, ever-present reality in our lives. Time: we live IN it and WITH it and yet we wonder, as Judy Collins sings in her haunting song, "...who knows where the time goes?"

Each day we refer to time as if it is something we can see, hold, or hoard...we talk about using time, spending time, doing time, taking time, saving time, wasting time. We refer to the right time, the wrong time, free time, down time, good times, hard times and time out.

Our speech is filled with images of time: always, never, forever, eternity, infinity, slow, fast, wait, stall, hurry, haste, delay, dawdle, tardy, postpone, pause, defer, rush, scurry, accelerate and the list goes on and on. Time is referred to as elastic; it can creep by with excruciating slowness when every minute seems endless. And it can speed up with hours passing as minutes and even days rushing by.

Today's reading from the Book of Ecclesiastes is all about time—we hear that "for everything there is a season and a time for every matter under heaven." We are told that God has enabled human beings to mark time, that God has put a sense of past and future in our minds—and so we celebrate such things as New Year's Day. And we counsel young adults: it gets better. We hear, in Ecclesiastes 3:1, that God "has made everything suitable for its time."

Time is a dominant theme in the Bible overall...in every book in the Bible there are references to time. Sometimes stories are told with minute-by-minute detail, sometimes entire centuries slip by in the space of one line. Time in the Bible is important, confusing, mysterious, precise, vague, relevant and irrelevant.

The first words in Genesis are “in the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth...” What beginning? What was God doing before God created the world? Was there a beginning? Is there a time before time, a time before God? And what was God doing before God was worrying about us?

In Exodus, God hears the cries of the enslaved Hebrew people and empowers Moses to lead God’s people out of slavery, out of Egypt and into the Promised Land. But some of the glory of the Exodus fades when we realize that the Hebrew people had been crying out in slavery for 430 years. Why did God wait so long before liberating the Hebrew people? Does time have meaning to God?

The Bible has been called the book of the “mighty acts of God.” But the Bible covers well over 4,000 years of God’s history and there are long periods when God does not seem to say or do anything. John Calvin said that if God withdrew God’s hand from Creation for even an instant everything would fall apart and collapse into chaos. But if you read Scripture carefully, there are large gaps when God is silent, inactive, or at least seems not to be doing or saying anything.

In the New Testament, time continues to be confusing and ambiguous. Almost everything we know about Jesus takes place in a less than three year span after he turned thirty. For years scholars have wondered, what was Jesus doing before he was thirty?

Throughout Jesus’ ministry time seems fluid and both critically important and not important at all. In the Gospel of John, Chapter 11, Mary and Martha send Jesus the urgent plea, “Lazarus, our brother whom you love, is ill. Come quick!” Jesus’ friend Lazarus is near death. Two terrified sisters, also Jesus’ friends, wait anxiously. But the Gospel of John says Jesus waited *three days* before setting out for Bethany. Why? No reason is given. By the time Jesus arrives in Bethany, Lazarus is dead, the funeral is over, Lazarus has been entombed and, in one translation of the Bible, Martha tells Jesus “by this time he stinketh.” As we know, Jesus raises Lazarus from the dead, but why the wait before going to Bethany?

In today's passage from Ecclesiastes, we hear that there is "a time to weep and a time to laugh, a time to mourn and a time to dance, a time to seek and a time to lose..." But, according to Scripture, *only God knows when that right time is.*

And so my brothers and sisters, as faithful Christians we put time in God's hands. BUT that does not mean we passively let time just happen, slip by, believing what will be will be. We have agency, we engage with God, we partner with God in the passing of time. We buy a 2011 calendar, we get a new date book, we go to our computers on-line planners, we set dates, we make plans, we look toward the New Year as a new start.

We partner with God in how we will use our time. But we know that all the calendars, date books, on-line planners and best lay strategies do not mean that we can bring time fully under our control. No matter how we TRY to control it, time unfurls each day in ways we cannot predict and cannot manage.

Kenny sits by Marcia's bed in Hospice all day long and sleeps by her side all night knowing that Marcia is dying. But when Marcia dies it is still too soon, still not the right time, Kenny longs for more time with the one he loves so much.

Mary and Lynn decide to take time to live apart to work on their own selves and their relationship and they set aside four long months to travel deep within individually to explore, refocus and pray on what is next. Sometimes the days apart creep by with painful slowness, sometimes the weeks seem to pass quickly.

I make big plans to go on an adventurous two month bicycle trip and suddenly I am in the emergency room in terrible pain and then at midnight undergoing surgery for a rare abdominal obstruction.

How true are the words from Ecclesiastes 9:11, *Again I saw that under the sun the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, nor bread to the wise, nor riches to the intelligent, nor favor to the skillful; but time and chance happen to them all.*

We cannot control time. It is an enormous, puzzling, enigmatic **gift from God that we live in and through.** We try to plan and organize time and yet time is never fully under our control or in our power.

**And so at the start of this New Year, I want to remind us of how we as people of faith deal with and live in and through time: our goal is to be supple, flexible, and resilient.**

Our goal is to be supple, flexible and resilient so that we can live through the times of our lives—whatever happens, whatever surprises us, whatever unexpected joys or traumas are placed in our path—with a sense of readiness, competency, strength, hardiness, buoyancy and fluidity.

The best way we, as people of faith, can live in and through time is to be prepared. Prepared for the unknown, prepared for revelations, prepared for setbacks, prepared for hardships, prepared for joy. And the best way we, as people of faith, can be prepared is to keep God at the center of our lives.

With God at the center of our lives, our beings, our spirits, our bodies, we can be supple, flexible and resilient. With God at the center of our lives, we are equal to what unfolds each day, we are equal to the ups and downs life throws at us, we are equal to the highs and lows. We are there, in them, feeling all the feelings, not pushing life away or drugging life away or eating life away or sleep-walking life away, not passing time but living time. All of it. With God at the center we are IN our lives, fully alive, fully engaged, fully present.

No matter how many calendars we buy and mark up, no matter how many dates, goals and New Year's resolutions we make, we cannot fully control time. Time marches on, as the saying goes. "Time is on my side," the Rolling Stones sang. But it isn't. It is not on anyone's side. Time is not for us or against us, it just is.

And so we need to be prepared—to live fully in and through time we need God at our center. Our goal is to be supple, flexible and resilient. Our plan is to be prepared. Our strategy is to keep God at the center of our lives.

Over Christmas, Michael and I drove to Philadelphia to see Sasha. I was surprised to see that on the outskirts of the city, there was a large billboard that said: BE PREPARED FOR AN EMERGENCY. Under that heading were three pictures with captions. The top picture was of an emergency kit, a box with a First Aid Kit, canned food and water in it. Under the picture it said: Make a Kit. The second picture was of a radio, TV and computer. That caption said: Be Informed. The bottom picture was of a pad of paper with writing on it and it said: Have a Plan.

Today is New Year's Day and you are driving down the highway of life and I am your billboard.

The billboard says: Time—Aim to be supple, flexible and resilient.

The top picture is of a Bible and the words under it say:  
Pray daily, meditate and talk with God.

The second picture is of a cross and the words under it say:  
Keep Jesus close as a friend, counselor and guide.

The bottom picture is a picture of you, and you have a flame in your belly and the words under it say:  
Keep God at your center.

Happy New Year my beloved brothers and sisters, may your time be fruitful,  
rewarding and filled with the Spirit.  
Amen.

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