I Corinthians 15:54-58 and Ecclesiastes 3:2
"A time for life and death"

A couple things happened over these past two weeks that reminded me of this Scripture that we are about to read in Ecclesiastes. A week ago on Friday we put down our cat Rocky who was 15, she was Bethany's cat and we got her within a few weeks of when we arrived here in Strasburg. This church over this past year has witnessed 14 people passing away and the same number was for last year. The highest number we have ever had before that has been 8 and 3 is the more normal number. 14 each year for two successive years. We are in this season of dying and being raised up again in the resurrection.

Also this past week or two we have really taken up our garden, we have uprooted plants and redefined beds, and dug up bushes and really done a number on the landscape of our house. Pretty much all we have left are a few peppers and some greens. But when you do that, there is no emotional attachment, no sadness that accompanies the pulling up of the garden because we know, it is time, it is the season to do it. We set the clocks back, the cold is coming in, and so the season to pull things up, not to plant, is pretty much now, unless you are doing cover crops, then planting season is also now. The corn has come down, there are a few brown fields of corn out there, but for the most part we accept it, because it is the season, it is the time for that.

Today we begin with the first of our polarities that we described last week in Ecclesiastes. We approach these Scriptures understanding that for every course of action in one direction, there will occur in due time an opposite reaction. This Scripture is less about know thyself and more about know thy time, we are put in a position to try to understand the season in which we find ourselves and to act in such a way that is consistent with that season. Our job is to discern the right and the wrong time for appropriate conduct and speech, but all within the context of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. With him as our foundation, that which does not change, then we can do all things in their due time. Let's read.

READ

So if you look at the sermon title, a time for life and a time for death, you will notice that the author never uses the term life but rather says birth, which is very different. Life is a continuous event, that dash between the years on our tombstone, how we lived is very different

from our birth which is a one time event that takes place for all us and over which we have no control and no say in. We are born, it happens to us, we live, we do that on our own volition.

In fact, all that we are going to read in Ecclesiastes is continuous life, it is part of the seasons of life, and so we can't get confused with the distinction between life and birth. The author is speaking about a time for birth, this one event, and a time for death, this one event. We have had many births in this church over these past two years, close to 8 I would say, I feel like Herod asking how many children do we have under two, we have two sets of twins in there as well. We are in a season of birth, in Toddler Gym on Friday we had 28 toddlers in Fellowship Hall. Some are younger and some a bit older, but that is quite a number for us, probably a record. We are in a season of birth in this church, and what we are seeing is that we are actually experiencing two seasons at the same time in this church.

I chose I Corinthians as our first reading because it gives us a perspective on death that Solomon did not have and did not understand. For Solomon death was the final word, it was the end. As birth was the beginning, so death was the end. Not so for followers of Jesus.

Did you notice what word was repeated three times in this Scripture, which sounds a bit dissonant with the topic of death? Victory, three times Paul speaks about victory when he is talking about the reality of death. Solomon never mentioned that word, in fact it would be the opposite of death, but for us victory is manifested in death. We have a victory in Jesus that comes as a result of his conquering death, as this Scripture tells us so clearly. This promise, this declaration is at the heart of our faith, which is nice to hear on this All Saints Day.

But Solomon begins the polarities by choosing two over which we have no control or power. We don't choose when we are born and we don't choose when we die. Now all the others are typically results of our actions and our choices, when to plant and when to uproot, we are doing that, we do the planting, we do the uprooting, but we don't choose to be born and we don't choose when we die, we should know that by now.

Interestingly enough in our choices Proverbs 26:4-5 tells us that depending on the context, depending on the situation, two different choices can be made for the same life event. Depending on the time and the place contradictory conduct can be espoused as appropriate action depending, well, on the situation. Birth and death are beyond our control, but planting and

uprooting, well that is something that we do ourselves, and in some way choose to do. All the other polarities that we are going to be seeing reflect a matter of choice within God's providence.

So let's look at these polarities that we are facing today, birth and death. Jesus' disciples refused to accept Jesus' words about his death. Peter said you will never die in the way that you say you will and Jesus calls him Satan and tells him to get behind him. The disciples cut off the ear of the temple guard when Jesus is arrested and he stops them from it, because it was his time to die, they were not willing to accept it. We do not accept death as a part of our life, like we accept birth as a part of our life. That is understandable, but we cannot take death out of the context of what we read in I Corinthians, this victory that we have in Jesus.

When we take part in the Lord's Supper together we are taking part in a time that the Holy Spirit is present with us as we celebrate the death of our Savior, it is a celebration, but we approach it more as a dirge and funeral than we do a victory. Today I would like for all of us to approach the table, to take the elements in a way that we understand the victory that we have in Jesus in his death. When his time came to die, it opened up a new birth in our lives that we would never have without his death.

The second pairing, a time to plant and a time to uproot, is used repeatedly in the Old Testament to describe God who planted the nation of Israel in the promised land and uprooted the other nations so that God's people could live in peace and security. But we also see once that happens that God speaks very clearly of planting other nations in those same lands and uprooting God's people because of their disobedience. So this image of planting and uprooting is understood to be much more of a metaphor than the phrases of birth and death which are taken much more literal.

Planting and uprooting nations has been a way of life in this world for the entire existence of humanity. We would be foolish to think that somehow our nation is somehow protected from being uprooted or that God has some special feeling for the United States that he doesn't have for another country. No, that is a not the case. This week we have our elections and again this year I was sent material by those who want to influence the election and influence you on how to vote. One was entitled, get this, how would Jesus vote?

So, if you wanted to know how Jesus would vote where would you start? With his words, right, with what he spoke about, and not what we speak about. What do we speak the most about and what are some of the hot button issues? Gender, sexuality, abortion, those were all the things that this material addressed, and these are all things that Jesus never addressed. What does Jesus address? This is how you should vote if you want to vote as Jesus voted: look at Matthew 25.

So what does this have to do with planting or uprooting? We often vote out of fear that we are going to be losing something that is fundamental to our way of life as Americans. I say vote in a way to maintain what is fundamental to who we are as disciples of Jesus, that is so much more important. Was Jesus a republican? Was Jesus a democrat? No, he was God.

Today is All Saints Day. The commemoration of All Saints Day began in the Pantheon in Rome on May 13 609 AD. It was a day to remember with affection those martyrs of the faith, those disciples of Jesus who had passed from this life through death into a new birth in the resurrection. We don't always do something different in our worship for All Saints Day, but this year, because it occurred on a Sunday, we are going to commemorate those who passed from last All Saints Day to this All Saints Day. Many more have passed than whom we will read in the previous year, I mentioned these past two years have been a record for us, but we wanted to take this time to commemorate those who have passed over this last year.

All Saints Day Commemoration