

Welcome – Rev. John Cleghorn

“There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under heaven.”

So begins the third chapter of the book of Ecclesiastes, which many scholars believe was written by King Solomon.

Today we celebrate the truth of King Solomon’s statement as it relates to our never-ending walk with God.

Today is the last Sunday of the liturgical year before a new cycle begins next week with advent. It is also a day when we can celebrate all those who joined our church in 2008.

So, with the help of several of our new members, we will take a kind of tour of all seasons of the liturgical year.

I suppose you could think about this day of worship as the Epcot version of the liturgical calendar. You know Epcot, the Disney recreation of the world where it’s only about a 75-foot walk from England to Germany to Italy.

In somewhat the same way, we will take the next hour to visit each of the seasons of the church, reminding ourselves of the movement of an entire year with God ... all before the cycle begins to repeat itself next week, as we take our first steps toward Bethlehem and the manger.

I was explaining the intent of today’s service to the Worship Committee last week and Jeff Sinn observed that church today would be like going to a make-up class. If you weren’t in church on Easter or Pentecost or Epiphany Sunday or any other day, for that matter, this is your chance to make up.

That’s not exactly what I had in mind. And Jeff was kidding. I think.

But, however you think about it, I invite you to suspend your sense of time for the next hour and indulge, even for a little bit, in the fullness of all of our seasons with God and all they mean to us as pilgrims on our respective faith journeys.

Ordinary Time: Ann Dorsett

Sometimes we need long periods of the ordinary to recognize fully what is extraordinary. That is a sense of the role of Ordinary Time in the liturgical calendar. The

calendar includes two periods of Ordinary time that frame the two great cycles of the church, the two great stories of the church – Christmas and Easter.

In this sense, “ordinary” means standard, normal or usual. Thus worship in these weeks follows a consistent rhythm and is made up of similar elements week to week. In these “ordinary” weeks, the church focuses on meeting God in worship on Sunday, the Lord’s Day, through a predictable pattern of prayers, liturgies, hymns and a range of scripture passages exploring the fullness of God’s word.

The spirit of these long, uninterrupted walks with God is captured in Psalm 23.

Psalm 23

Opening Hymn: Leaning on the Everlasting Arms – Printed in Bulletin

Advent: Terry Boots

What the church calendar calls the Christmas cycle actually has three components: Four weeks of Advent leading to the twelve days of Christmas followed by the day of Epiphany.

The four weeks of Advent are intended to provide for a period of waiting, a time to cultivate our awareness of God’s action – past, present and future.

In Advent, we hear the prophecies of the coming of the Messiah, a pledge to the people of Israel for the ultimate fulfillment of the Old Testament promises.

It is for us today a time of waiting and hoping for Christ, who has come and will come again. The prophet Isaiah captures this spirit of waiting for the fulfillment of promises in these verses:

Isaiah 40: 1-11

Hymn: O Come O Come, Emanuel – Verse 1

Christmas: Carol Williams

At Christmas, the waiting is over. The Word becomes flesh and we sing, “Glory to God in the Highest.”

It is a special time for the senses as we sing favorite carols and we take in the visual symbols and images of the season – angels, candles, the star of peace, the shepherd and the manger.

The Christmas season extends from December 25 through January 5, usually including two Sundays. This allows us to consider the meaning of the incarnation more fully than can be expressed by a single day, which is so often overcome with the commercial aspects of Christmas.

The Christmas season includes Epiphany Sunday. Epiphany comes from the Greek word meaning “manifestation” or “appearance,” as God was made manifest, first to the Magi, who visited the new born king, and to all who would recognize Christ in their own lives.

Matthew 2:1-11

Hymn: It Came Upon a Midnight Clear – Verses 1&2

Lent: Sophia and Kristen Weiss

Lent is a season of preparation and repentance in which we anticipate Holy Week and Easter.

Lent invites us to make our hearts ready by recalling Jesus’ passion and celebrating his resurrection. The practice of a 40-day preparation period began in the Christian church in the third and fourth centuries. The number 40 carries significance throughout the Bible. Israel spent 40 years in the wilderness and Jesus 40 days.

Lent has also been a time when those wishing to be baptized prepare to profess their faith on Easter morning. But for any of us to be baptized, the light of the world first had to overcome the darkness, as described in these verses from the gospel of Luke.

Luke 23:44-49

Easter: Lawrence David Sander

While commercial excess has made Christmas the most visible and notable of the Christian holidays, it is Easter that is the most celebrative day of the church year, a day

when all the hopes and expectations of Christians are realized in the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

The stone is rolled back and the light of the world overcomes darkness for the last time. Death is defeated forever and Christ the King reigns in heaven.

Here at Caldwell, Easter will always hold special significance as the day that the Observer declared the story of the Miracle on Fifth Street. That day, a number of our members woke up intending to go to church, but not knowing where ... until they read the newspaper. They have been with us ever since.

In addition, this last Easter we celebrated the ministry of Rev. Dr. Charlie MacDonald, who retired that day after leading the church through the wilderness to its resurrection by God's hand.

We worship a God of surprises, as reflected in the life of this church ... and in these familiar verses from the Gospel of John.

John 20:1-9.

Hymn 113: Christ the Lord is Risen Today verses 1 & 2

Christ the King Sunday Rev. John Cleghorn

Romans 8:31-39

As you may know, or you may have noticed in your bulletin, today is known in the church as Christ the King Sunday. It concludes the second and longest of the two cycles of Ordinary Time.

In a sense, today is a doorway and we cross over its threshold to begin our approach to Bethlehem and to the manger.

So, we end the liturgical where we began ... and indeed where we dwell throughout the church year ... in and with our Lord Jesus Christ, who said "I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end."

In making this journey, we are shown that life in and through Christ never ends. Yes, the years pass, each with its own trials and joys, each marked by its own losses and its

triumphs. But we journey on in the confidence that through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, God redefined time.

You recall what scripture says about the day Christ was crucified. In the sixth hour, when daylight should have ruled the skies, “there was darkness over the whole land.” The sun had stopped. Time stood still for those hours, according to the Biblical account in the gospels. When time began again, death and sin would never have dominion again. And when time resumed, it would never mean quite the same thing again.

Like many of you I am sure, I love it when Lisa Lawrence and the Caldwell Choir sing “On Time God” as they did last week. The words of that song acknowledge there are periods in our lives that cannot pass too quickly, times of difficulty and suffering. In those times, as the song says, we are like Job, calling on God to act.

Then we hear the words of Paul’s letter to the Romans: “Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will hardship, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?”

To that we might add: Will illness, or recession, or joblessness, or foreclosure or anxiety or fear or fatigue or depression?

No, Paul writes, none of these things can separate us from the love of God. Indeed, Paul declares with the irrational boldness of a person of faith, “in all of these things we are more than conquerors” through the God who loved us in Jesus Christ.

That assurance is what we celebrate in all seasons of the church.

Whether we are meeting God in the ordinary or extraordinary phases of our life together as the body of Christ, we can greet each season, each day, with Christ’s promise, “Lo, I am with you always, even to the close of the age.”

Amen.