

## Arden Pastoral Charge

June 13, 2021:

A Time for Everything

Rev. Cheryl McMurray

Jesus said: "When two or three are gathered in my name, I am there."

Today we gather in body and Spirit, and Christ is here.

Today we are saying goodbye. We are ending the covenantal relationship we entered into three years ago. In a few weeks, I will be joining the St. Paul's United Church congregation in Stirling. Due to COVID restrictions we cannot meet for a send off, but please do know that I wish you well, and I know you wish me well too.

### Gathering Prayer:

"Our church, like any community, changes.

Babies are born.

Children grow up.

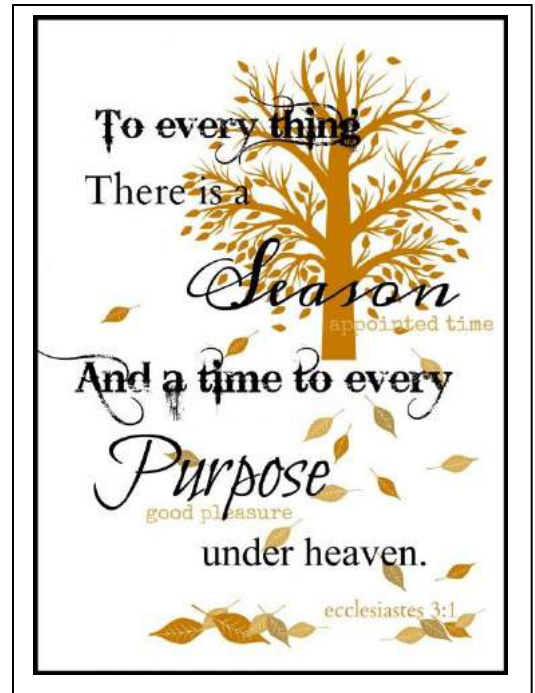
Loved ones and friends grow old.

People move into our community and church.

Others leave us, moving on to new places,  
new experiences, and new opportunities.

Let us remember always that the ministry in this place is Christ's ministry,  
entrusted to us as part of his Body.

Our ministry belongs to Jesus and is ongoing.



When a minister comes into these churches,  
we covenant with one another;  
we promise to walk together as God's people,  
deepening our commitment to Jesus Christ and growing closer to God.  
God's covenant with us never changes,  
but our covenants with one another do change.  
Today we mark the ending of this covenant of ministry,"<sup>1</sup>  
and the beginning of what will be, in Christ's name. Amen.

**Scripture:** Our scripture this morning comes from the book of Ecclesiastes. Ecclesiastes is a book of wisdom literature in the Hebrew Bible – the Old Testament. Biblical scholars believe Ecclesiastes was written for King Solomon, who was considered to be the wisest king of his time and place. The author of Ecclesiastes, Koheleth, provided 'words of wisdom to the wise'.

### **Reading Ecclesiastes 3: 1 - 14 from the Inclusive Bible**

*There is a time for everything, a season for every purpose under heaven:  
A season to be born and a season to die;  
A season to plant and a season to harvest;  
A season to hurt and a season to heal;  
A season to tear down and a season to build up;  
A season to cry and a season to laugh;  
A season to mourn and a season to dance;  
A season to scatter stones and a season to gather them;  
A season to keep and season to throw away;  
A season for holding close and a season for holding back;  
A season to seek and a season to lose;  
A season to tear and a season to mend;  
A season to be silent and a season to speak;  
A season to love and a season to hate;*

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<sup>1</sup> Celebrate God's Presence, 696.

*A season for hostilities and a season for peace.*

*What do workers gain from their efforts? I have reflected on this while learning all the kinds of work God gives to humankind. God has made everything in harmony with the divine; yet although the Almighty has imbued eternity in our soul, we are unable to grasp the totality of God's work from beginning to end.*

*What I do know is that what is best for us is to be happy and enjoy life as long as we live. And God's gift to us is to eat and drink and find fulfillment in our work. I understand that whatever God does will endure for eternity; nothing can be added to it, nothing can be taken away. God makes it this way to keep reverence for the sacred alive in us.*

This is the Word of God for the people of God. Thanks be to God. Amen.

### **Thoughts Along the Way:**

Nothing stays the same, it all changes. That is what Koheleth was saying, wasn't it? *There is a time for everything, a season for every purpose under heaven.* And while all of us live within seasons, there are some, I have learned, that are particular – special perhaps - to our communities of Arden and Henderson and Mountain Grove.

There is a season for fresh boiled maple syrup in later winter; and a season for fresh garden produce in summer.

There is a season for snowbirds leaving until warm weather comes again; and a season for that warm weather and cottagers and family and friends that visit.

There is a season for blackflies and mosquitoes and deer flies; nuff said about that.

There is a season for potholes on the roads; nuff said about that too.

There is a season for seeing turkeys cross my lawn, seeing deer tracks on my driveway, and seeing what I swear were bear tracks too.

There is a season for hunting and fishing; for providing sustenance for your family in the traditional ways that go back centuries.

There is a season for pancake and French toast breakfasts, for yard sales, for steak dinners and smorgasbords, for making apple pies, and for Christmas luncheons.

There is a season for gathering in fellowship, for refreshments after church, for Thursday morning coffee hour, for Family Fun Nights, for movie nights, and for VBS.

There is a season to enjoy the gifts of music that abound from those who share their talents with us; from singers in the pews, from the church choir, from Clearview and from our own children's bell choir.

There is a season to offer appreciation and gratitude for all those who join in worship, for all those who work to make worship possible, and for all those who give of their time and talent and treasure in order to sustain our places of worship.

There is a season for learning...

I came to Arden Pastoral Charge as a student entering my time of Supervised Ministry Experience. It meant living away from home and my hubby for most of the week. It meant setting up a household of my own, for the first time ever, and that wasn't all bad! It meant getting to know the area, walking the village, and driving the back roads. I remember Bill Haw telling me that the reason the roads were so twisty-turny, was that God - in looking over the landscape of rocks and water - dropped a pocketful of snakes from on high. Where they landed was where the roads went. It meant getting to know getting to know the particulars of these three congregations, and in doing so, getting to know all of you.

It meant walking into experiences that were new to me; some that I was excited about, and some I was anxious about. Funerals were the one thing I was quite anxious about. It is such a precious and heartfelt time for family and friends, and I was very nervous about all that encompassed and entailed. Before I came here, I had only presided at one funeral. I bet you didn't know that on my very first week here, on my very first day in the office, I received a call about presiding at a funeral. That was the first of eleven funerals I would prepare for while ministering here, and before I leave I will be honoured to preside at the funeral of George Gaylord on June 26<sup>th</sup>.

Now, the experience of offering sacraments – that was something I was excited about. To be able to stand at the table of Christ, where all are welcome and none shall go hungry, to be able to welcome you in your participation in a tradition, in the sacrament of communion, that joins us into the community of believers since Christ's time – over centuries and around the world – that is a truly an awe filled experience. To be able to celebrate the sacrament of baptism was nothing but a joy. During my time here, we have celebrated the joy of baptizing and welcoming nine children of God, and in all three churches. The fact that three of those were my grandsons from out of town, will be a memory I treasure from my time here gratefully.

Of course, there is a season that has engulfed us all, has been the reality of my ministry experience here for the past 15 months; this season of COVID 19. This is a season of self isolation, of quarantine, of mask wearing, of physical distancing from extended family and friends. This is a season of increased use of technology, of online schooling, of zooming our coffee hours and meetings, and watching Sunday worship on youtube. This is a season for family time, enforced family time, but family time nonetheless. This is a season for exploring and gaining skills in baking and gardening and crafting. This is a season for self reflection and examining what is important to us out there in the world: our extended family, friends, neighbours, colleagues and co-workers. This is a season for thinking about how we spend our time and our money. Thinking about what we believe, about our faith in the midst of troubles, about why we worship, about why church and our church community is important to us. And the season is coming, ever closer,

where the restrictions of COVID will be lifted, where we will not only see but hug our family and friends, where we will join in worship, in person, together again.

Turns out Koheleth was right. *There is a season for everything, a season for every purpose under heaven. But, you might ask, what do we gain from our efforts, from all the uncertainty of life?* Listen to Koheleth's answer:

*I have reflected on this while learning all the kinds of work God gives to humankind. God has made everything in harmony with the divine; yet our minds are unable to grasp the totality of God's work, to recognize the eternity with God gifted us. What I do know is that what is best for us is to be happy and enjoy life as long as we live. And God's gift to us is to eat and drink and find fulfillment in our work.*

That I have done, here with all of you in Arden and Henderson and Mountain Grove, and I am grateful. Peace and blessings be upon you. Amen.

### **Prayers of the People**

"Friends, you called me into your midst to serve with you in ministry. I thank you for your love, kindness and support during these past three years. I am grateful for the struggles, the surprises, and for the opportunities we have shared; and I ask you for forgiveness for the mistakes I have made.

As I leave, I carry with me all that I have learned here.

I pray that our time together and our parting now be pleasing and acceptable to God.

I release you now from turning to me and depending on me.

I encourage your continuing ministry here and will pray for you."<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Celebrate God's Presence

Let us come to God in prayer, let us pray:

“O God, you have bound us together in covenant relationship  
for a time as pastor and people.  
You called us to work for the advancement of your realm in our midst,  
In our community, and in the world.  
We give you thanks for the ministry we have shared in recent years.  
We thank you for your gifts of forgiveness and love in the face of our failures.  
We thank you for your presence,  
For the deeper knowledge we have gained of you  
And of one another because we have journeyed together.  
Be with those who leave and those who stay.  
May the new stages of our life apart be richly blessed and guided by you.

All this we pray in the name of Jesus Christ, your Son, and our Lord,”<sup>3</sup>  
as he taught us to pray to our Mother of Wisdom and Our Father...

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name.  
Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.  
Give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our trespasses,  
as we forgive those who trespass against us;  
and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.  
For thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory,  
for ever and ever. Amen.

We give thanks to God for blessings and gifts given. We, in turn, offer our gifts of time, talent and treasure to God. Your gifts can be sent to June Hughes for Arden United Church, Sheila Deline for Henderson United Church, or Sharon MacMunn for Mountain Grove United Church. You can also visit our website – **[www.ardenpastoralcharge.ca](http://www.ardenpastoralcharge.ca)** – where you will find a ‘Donate’ button.

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<sup>3</sup> Celebrate God’s Presence, 703-4.

On behalf of the congregations of Arden, Henderson and Mountain Grove, I do want to thank you for your ongoing financial contributions.

**Benediction:**

A light shines in the darkness and the darkness has not overcome it.  
There is no greater gift and no greater task  
than to be the light of Christ to the world.  
You are blessed by God. That light shines in you.  
Go forward this day, and share the light and blessing with all you meet.

And now, may the grace of Christ attend you,  
the love of God surround you,  
and the Holy Spirit keep you. Amen.