

A Time to Listen

Inspired Text

Ecclesiastes 3:1 New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)

3 For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven:

Message

And then what of a time to listen? What of a time to be listened to?

56 years ago today, the world learned an irreversible lesson in public hatred. The real time experience of the murder of President John F. Kennedy, was the most violent loss that can be experienced by any family or group of loved ones and it played out in a more graphic and impersonal way than had ever been seen before. Television meant that the visceral and bewildering grief of a mother, children, siblings, parents, friends was transformed into a catastrophic collective memory for a generation. It was new...it made us sick. This one horror, broadcast innocently to the world, was media's original sin paving the sad way for two of my earliest memories as a 3 year old....the death of Martin Luther King, Jr. followed only two months later by Senator Robert Kennedy. I remember so many grown-ups crying...

But blessedly, even as a child born into a world where the genie of mass media had been unleashed, I was also the beneficiary of those who knew that children were out in the world being poisoned by what we were seeing, learning the words "assassination" and "war" before we could write our own names. Among the visionaries who said a defiant "no" to the increasingly public orgy of destruction, were a group of artists, educators and innovators in New York as well as a Presbyterian Minister and jazz pianist from Pittsburgh. And so, it was quite brilliantly...mercifully, that Sesame Street and Mr. Rogers came to my rescue. They gave my young world a counter narrative to the rage and violence that washed over my parents every night at 6pm. They gave me soft creatures with friendly faces, easy words, lovely music, laughter and a sense of wonder. Some may call it simple or saccharine...but they opened a door for me that still lets me enter into a belief in something better...they gave me a foundation of hope in a time of

dire hopelessness when I had no idea I was being cultivated. And above all, the most valuable gift they gave me was **a time to listen, and a time to be listened to.**

Media has continued to evolve of course. Where it only had gills and was swimming in the protoplasmic muck of network tv and AM radio in the 1960s, it is now a multi-limbed, highly evolved organism with massively overdeveloped senses and modes of moving itself around...not to mention ways of fending off predators. Media might even very soon find a way to inseminate and birth itself from its own decomposing corpse. It literally has a life of its own independent of the human beings who created and nurtured it. The same media that assaulted us as an unholy aberration during the first Kennedy assassination, taught us that it could happen again with King and defined the new and tragic normal with RFK. Today, each subsequent public destruction of life and the media's frenzy to feed on the grief of those most impacted, leaves me desperate to know...who and what is teaching us the value of a time to listen and a time to be listened to?

A time to listen to the easy words, the lovely music, the laughter...

Where is a time to listen to heartbeats before they are silenced? A time to listen to life as both the gentle brook and raging flood...both fire and light. A time to listen to the poetry of sex and the poignancy of math. A time to listen to harmony and dissonance in disagreement and song. A time to listen for compassion.

A time to listen...a time to be listened to...

Media, technology, snappy comebacks, stinging clapbacks...these will not save us.

We are saved in the same thing that makes great jazz. Music is not about the notes you play, but the silence in between.

For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven...a time to listen...a time to be listened to.

May it be so.