

## New Years Eve/Blessing of the Calendars

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*Ecclesiastes 3 - For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven: a time to be born, and a time to die; a time to plant, and a time to pluck up what is planted; a time to kill, and a time to heal; a time to break down, and a time to build up; a time to weep, and a time to laugh; a time to mourn, and a time to dance; **a time to throw away stones, and a time to gather stones together;** a time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing; a time to seek, and a time to lose; **a time to keep, and a time to throw away;** a time to tear, and a time to sew; a time to keep silence, and a time to speak; a time to love, and a time to hate; a time for war, and a time for peace.*

**Mark 1: 14-20 -** Jesus came to Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God, and saying, 'The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news.' As Jesus passed along the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and his brother Andrew casting a net into the lake—for they were fishermen. And Jesus said to them, 'Follow me and I will make you fish for people.' **And immediately they left their nets and followed him.** As he went a little farther, he saw James son of Zebedee and his brother John, who were in their boat mending the nets. **Immediately he called them; and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired men, and followed him.**

Jesus said, "Follow me" – and "immediately they left their nets and followed him."

The thing that catches me up short most about this story in Mark's Gospel is how *quickly* Simon Peter and Andrew respond when Jesus calls them. Picture Jesus (a carpenter) coming upon two men at the Sea of Galilee; they are doing something Jesus doesn't know very much about – fishing. But Jesus sees that these fishermen are working hard: Attending to what they need to attend to, caring for their boats and their nets, pulling in their catch, making a living.

And then Jesus says – 'follow me – come with me – I need you – I have something really important for you to do' – and the Gospel says, "**immediately**" they left their nets and followed him. The phrase is used not once, but twice – '**Immediately**' it says "he called them; - and they **followed** him."

What would it mean for us – in the coming year – to turn our attention (not just to what we have to attend to – our families, our work, our responsibilities) – but to turn our attention, our focus, our presence, our whole being, to those moments, those people, those situations into which we are called, dropping everything to go and to help, to share, to give, to extend a hand to a family member - or to a friend, - or to a stranger in need – "**immediately!**" No questions asked. No recognition required. Nothing in return **desired**.

Like me, you've probably heard the reading from Ecclesiastes many times – or said, or sung it. For everything there is a season. There is a season – turn, turn, turn. There are a couple of phrases in this translation, that I've never quite heard in the same way: "There is a time to throw away stones, and a time to gather stones together. . . . A time to keep, and a time to throw away."

This is a wisdom saying about the use of time – how we focus our time and attention. And it is for different purposes in different seasons – in different times of our lives. Some parts of our lives are about learning, acquiring knowledge, building – and others are about relinquishing, letting go, passing the baton.

What time is it for you? It's something to think about. It something to pray about.

We can always be enriched by learning about the rituals and prayer practices of other faith traditions – and (while they are not our own), we can learn from the wisdom there.

I vaguely remembered a practice in the Jewish Tradition, that involves throwing away, casting something off. – so I looked it up. The new year in Judaism is celebrated ritually over 10 days –The *Tashlich* ritual happens outside, not in a synagogue or house of worship. It is usually performed on the first day of Rosh Hashanah. They walk to flowing water (a creek or river, perhaps) on the afternoon of the first day and empty their pockets or toss bread, symbolically casting off our sins, throwing it into the water, and watching it wash away – float away.

And then over the next few days, they practice *Teshuvah* (literally "returning") the process by which they seek forgiveness from people that they may have wronged over the past year before – in quiet conversations, and phone calls, and over meals, trying to mend what is broken, seeking forgiveness from each other, and from God.

What might it mean to empty your pockets, symbolically or literally, and to celebrate the possibilities of a clean slate for the New Year! It's something to think about. It something to pray about.

Meister Eckhart was a German born theologian, philosopher and mystic in the 12<sup>th</sup> century. He said and wrote a lot about time, Once he shared an insight - he was talking about a moment – of knowing – that happens occasionally, - sometimes IMMEDIATELY - when we open ourselves up to God's presence in and with the way we choose to spend our time. Eckhart said, "And **suddenly** you know: It's time to start something **new** and trust the magic of beginnings."

Let something go, - drop it – empty your pockets – to begin something new. When you are called to do so -- It's something to think about. It something to pray about.

However you prepare for New Year – whether you eat black eyed peas, or make resolutions, or drink a toast, my prayer for all of us as we enter 2019 is that this year we will atune our hearts to discern when it is time to gather stones together, and when it is time to throw stones away, when it is time for keeping, and when it is time for letting go. Amen.