

Sermon: "Time and Time Again"**Scripture: Ecclesiastes 3:1-8****Preacher: Rev. Will Burhans****Date: February 6, 2021**

Did you know that in Greek there are two different words for time? There is Chronos and there is Kairos. Chronos is time that is quantifiable, measurable and that determines so much of the activities of our lives. It's time to wake, time to eat, do I have time for this, are we running out of time for that, time is ticking. It's an impersonal often uninspiring reality that can often feel as oppressive as anything as the project deadline approaches or death itself does.

But the Greeks had another word for time that our scriptures capitalized on and used quite often and that was Kairos. Kairos refers to time not in a quantitative sense but a qualitative sense, time that is not measurable but marked by what is happening in it. Kairos is the kind of time that we refer to when we say the time is ripe for something, it's the right, critical, or opportune time or moment. In scripture we hear this use of time when suggesting that God has ordained a particular time. And to say this, that there is a right time for something is to affirm that there is a standard of what is right and good out there that holds this world and our lives in place. There is for us a God ordained time, it's a touch of eternity that intersects within our own course of time.

The Gospel of Luke refers to Jesus coming "in the fullness of time". And when Jesus describes his ministry to the elders in the synagogue, he says that "the time has been fulfilled". In the book of Esther when she proclaims that she was called for "just such a time as this", they are talking about Kairos time, not a Chronos. Kairos is the kind of time that Ecclesiastes refers to in chapter 3, that

Leigh just read for us, that there is a time to be born and a time to die, a time to weep and a time to laugh, a time to embrace and a time to refrain from embracing... in other words there is a higher ordering of time and what it's meant for, in God's mind, that we can choose to be attentive to.

For gardening the higher ordering is the order of earth's dormancy and verdancy and you wait in one time and you act in another time. You might mark the passage of time to get from one to the other but you are submissive or obedient to the rhythms or you won't get what you are needing. As in the material world of the earth and her processes so too on the level of our emotional and psychological existence too. There are times ordained by God for something new to arrive and be accomplished, there is a fullness of time that can occur in our lives both on an individual level as well as communal levels, even the national or global level. Some have said that in our nation there is a Kairos moment occurring right now with the convergence of 3 pandemics that we are all involved in and haven't yet dealt adequately with – the spread of the virus (although we are getting there with that), the scourge of racism (still a long way to go), and the degradation of our environment (still so much to do). Is this a kairos moment when we are being called to wake up and change our lives to these realities. God is speaking but are we listening. But this is true of our individual lives as well where time comes to be ripe.

Our work then is to recognize the, God ordained times that we are to plant and when we are to uproot, times for holding on and times for letting go, time to kill or let die and others time to heal. Now our capacity or ability to know these times, as Ecclesiastes reminds us, is limited, he says in fact it's very limited. So we do our best. An angsty British band I loved from my youth called The The had a

break-up song whose line has always stuck with me where they sing – “was our love too strong to die or were we just too weak to kill it?” That to me speaks so powerfully to how hard it can be to know the Kairos moment. Is this a time to kill it or to faithfully hang on and heal it? Is this a time to hold strong in my search or to relinquish it, to be silent or to speak up? Such questions are often really important questions to be asked in prayer and within community so we are not asking alone in a vacuum.

So I’m saying a few things in this – that there are right times for the right things because there is a deeper order and container that is God’s providence within which this existence toils – that’s the word Ecclesiastes uses, “all this toil under the sun”. Secondly, that we usually need to put some work into discerning what is the right time that God ordains for certain things, even while humbly acknowledging how limited our capacity to know for certain. And finally that the work of discernment in whether this is a kairos moment requires the involvement of our community whatever shape that takes in our lives. You are uncertain if this is your kairos moment then ask us, ask them, get feedback on what is stirring in you.

There is a time for everything under the heavens and sometimes that time is to be discerned by us, but sometimes there is no decision to be made necessarily but rather a situation to be attentive to and trustful of, to listen for God’s voice in, a time we find ourselves that maybe we’d rather not be in but we can choose to understand it as a kairos moment - I guess this is a time of letting go and it’s my time to learn that. Or I guess this is a time to refrain from embracing because of the greater good that NOT embracing offers and I need to endure this. Or this is a more fallow season in my life, less planting and seeding

and producing, and more waiting and listening and allowing to be. Or we believe this to be a moment in our national life that we as a church need to be a part of responding to the cries for greater justice. But to trust that there is a time for everything and a season to everything under heaven is to trust that God has got us and holds us in arms unseen.

But let me also get a little more personal here. Speaking of the time, the Kairos, that we find ourselves in right now with the pandemic, 11 months in, I know it has been hard and the loss within it great for so many but this is a time no more removed from God than when everything is going along swimmingly for us; in fact we could choose to be closer to God than ever before by hearing God's calling to US for just such a time as this? But what is this time for you...

- Is it a time to weep - to let go of your strong façade and give yourself to truly grieving for what you have lost, whether anyone else thinks you should be weeping or not, maybe it's a time to weep?
- Is it a time to reach out – to be vulnerable enough to seek reconciliation in a relationship that was dear to you but is now broken?
- Or is it time to stop reaching out and to let go? Let God hold it now.
- Is it time to be brave - to have that conversation with your spouse or friend that you know you need to have but have lacked the stomach for fear of the rift it could cause?
- Is it a time to seek help – to call that doctor or psychiatrist, that therapist whose card you have, that pastor because you have been putting up a good front but you know you are not well.
- Is it a time to get sober - have you been told that you are drinking too much these days and it's effecting those you care about? Time to stop denying.

- Is it a time to make the long-delayed decision and to trust that God will hold you through however it turns out, no matter the consequences?
- Is it a time to finally put the question of your job on the table and to acknowledge that there are more important things than money to be pursued?
- Let's say this is a Kairos moment for you. What is it a time for? What are you hearing God ask of you, nudge you toward, calling out in you, calling you out for? Maybe it's something dramatic that is needed that you've barely given yourself permission to contemplate and maybe it's to stop being so dramatic and just be for a while, for you are ok and loved as you are.

Jesus our Lord, struggled with these things as we do. What he did was he went out to isolated wilderness places to pray by himself, especially after intensive engagement with others. He knew there were times for pressing in and times to withdraw. And in his prayer times I would bet he worked and prayed to align his own sense of timing with that of God's. At one point he tells his disciples that it is not yet his time and at another, "the time has come." And with his full attention to time's rhythms and ripeness and in his full trust of God to hold it all he broke through the bounds of linear time itself through his death and resurrection and entered eternity, inviting us there as well, yes after death but in the time of now as well. God is with us in this time, in the time you find yourself, know that and remember it as we celebrate together at the Lord's table, a table set for each of us and all of us together at this time...