

OUR TIMES ARE IN YOUR HANDS

Ephesians 1:3-14

The writer of the Ephesian letter, Paul or one of his disciples, lays out for us the grand sweep of history. The bookends of time are there—the beginning, the end, as well as the middle. It all starts with this phrase: “before the foundation of the world”. Here we are brought back to what Stephen Hawkins called “the great wall of time” at the moment of The Big Bang, when time itself commenced. But this letter penetrates through that “great wall of time”—“before the foundation of the world.” Here we enter a dimension that is essentially beyond comprehension, Before the worlds were spoken into existence. Before time itself was rolled out like a carpet.

Time for most philosophers and scientists is simply a measurement of movement. The world spins on its axis for twenty-four hours and we call it a day. The world revolves around the sun for 365 days plus and we call it a year. Time is simply a measurement of movement, as when we say we are going 65 miles per hour. Time and movement are linked in the modern mind.

In the Greek language the word used to designate such an understanding is Chronos, from which we get chronology. That means measured time, a measurable duration. So Chronos measures movement in space. And in that sense, all Chronos is essentially the same. In fact, so similar that many Greek thinkers thought of time as circular, and thus time repeated itself. Like the earth going around and around on its axis and round and round the sun. Again and again, Chronos repeats itself.

But the writer of Ephesians sees time as a creation of God, a work of God not unlike the world itself. Time has a shelf life, just like the world. It begins and it ends. The world is created in time, moves across time, and then comes to an abrupt halt.

And yet here is the marvel. Ephesians and indeed the entire New Testament believes that time moves into certain phases that are more crucial than others. These pivotal periods are what the New Testament calls “Kairos”, that is, time filled with deep significance. Not just passing time or killing time or marking time. But time that bristles with meaning, like your birthday. As in B.C., before Christ, and A. D., Anno Domino, the year of our Lord. We in the Christian tradition mark off time in its relationship to that decisive moment when the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth.

The writer of Ephesians says that God “set forth in Christ a plan for the fullness of time to gather all things in heaven and things on earth.” The “fullness of time”—what a magnificent phrase! When the time was just right, Jesus came among us, living our life, dying our death, tasting the resurrection promised for us. These were times filled to the brim. This is the middle point of all history, the center of time, the fulcrum that moves the rest of our days. Something happened in Jesus’ short life that stamped all the rest of human history with a special meaning.

Now all our moments have the potential to become “Kairos” moments. Moments when the transition from B.C. to A.D. becomes a distinct possibility for us. Occasions when the movement from death to life, despair to hope, indifference to love opens before us. The “fullness of time” now is available at all times and all seasons.

Finally the writer of the Ephesian letter looks to the future, that eschatological moment when all the threads will be gathered up and time will be no more. The writer says that the Holy Spirit is the “pledge of our inheritance toward redemption as God’s own people.” The writer sees that time will come to an end when we receive the inheritance promised to us, when redemption in all its fullness comes to God’s people.

This is the promised Rest, the Promised Land, the place where time is transformed into eternity in the presence of God. Now all Chronos becomes Kairos. The point of the entire journey is revealed in the presence of God before whom every knee bows and every tongue confesses that Jesus is Lord. That is where all roads converge.

Likewise, the writer of Ecclesiastes sensed that some moments really are laden with special significance. The poet insists, "There is a time for every matter under heaven". Everything has its appointed season-birth and death, planting and reaping, killing and healing, destruction and construction, weeping and laughing, mourning and dancing, gathering and throwing away stones. There is a time for embracing and not embracing, seeking and losing, keeping and throwing away, tearing and sewing, silence and speech, love and hate, war and peace. There is a right moment for every human experience-both the joys and the sorrows of life. For everything there is a season.

Phil Witherspoon was kind enough to lend me a marvelous book by Rabbi Abraham Heschel entitled **The Sabbath**. Heschel notes that when "God blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy", that means that at least once a week we are reminded that there is a season for every human venture. Six days we work and toil and one day is set aside to remind ourselves who we are and whose we are. This day of rest and renewal reminds us that even God rested on the seventh day of creation. And this day reminds us that the Egyptians never allowed the Hebrew slaves to rest.

So once a week we set apart time and call it sacred time, time to recharge our lives in Christ. Heschel writes this, "The Bible is more concerned with time than with space. It sees the world in the dimension of time. It pays more attention to generations, to events, than to countries, to things. It is more concerned with history than geography. To understand the teaching of the Bible, one must accept its premise that time has a meaning for life which is at least equal to that of space; that time has a significance of its own."

That means that Christians on the Lord's Day take a break from our usual pursuits to remind us that life is more than the accumulation of things in space. It is also about time apart to discover sacred moments, indeed, holy moments, to reflect on God's love for us. Kairos moments to consider afresh our calling to be disciples of Christ. And that takes time, filled time in the presence of God. Here you may rediscover your calling as it takes shape in the present moment.

Have you ever felt that your life was entering upon a certain phase, one that demanded a concrete response from you? And you sensed that this new leg of the journey demanded new things of you, a particular set of decisions. Junctures, transition points, times for change-all these require something from you even now. Perhaps you are going through one of those stages of your life that feels like Kairos time. Perhaps you hear a still small voice calling you forward, asking something of you, demanding your attention. You know this is not just Chronos, time slipping away. This is a Kairos moment that insists that you make a decision, take a leap of faith, journey forward in trust.

These Kairos moments make you realize that you need to step through another door. That means other doors are closed behind you. Those options are no longer appropriate for you. Other doors stand ready to be opened before you. It is like falling in love. All the others you may have been interested in are now behind you. The beloved is before you and that one alone. That means forsaking all others. Those doors are no longer an option.

It is like being called to follow Christ. The door is open before you and other doors now are slammed shut. That may mean laying down your old nets and venturing into a new world. The old life closes off behind you. Maybe you have come to a point in your journey where the nets have entangled you. They have become a hindrance. They need to be put aside. The road ahead in Christ is calling you to

travel lighter with fewer distractions. This is not the same old same old, the repetitious world of Chronos. This is a Kairos moment when things really can and do change. The road opens before you.

Some of you know that I just spent seven days by myself in the mountains north of Las Vegas, NM. Our family owns a cabin there on a lovely creek in a canyon. I have always loved that cabin but I had never before spent any extended time there. And I had never spent that much time by myself-seven days! Now I realize this was not forty days in the wilderness. But it was seven! No computer, no newspapers, no cable TV. Yes, I had my books and my phone and my iPod and my boom box and my VCR player and my movies and my television. No, this was not quite the Judean wilderness!

And I had two visitors. One was Randy Campbell, the pastor at the Las Vegas church. We spent five wonderful hours together. I would say that those hours spent together were truly Kairos moments, time filled with significance. Why? For several reasons.

First, Randy and I had never really visited. Well, we had five hours to talk, from lunch to a long hike to a long visit on the front porch overlooking the creek. This was a house meeting in the best sense of the word. A relational meeting, where you really truly to find out what makes the other person tick. It turns out that Randy and I are about the same age. That means that our life journeys cover a lot of the same tracks.

Perhaps those of us who are Baby Boomers are far too obsessed about what our generation has faced. Surely all generations face unique challenges. But we harbor a special fascination with how other Baby Boomers have negotiated their lives. What we discovered is that we have experienced life in some amazingly similar ways. Not the least of which is how our calling into the ministry has shaped our lives and formed us into the people we are now. It was fascinating to discover that my brother in Christ Randy Campbell has experienced the grace of Christ in so many ways that are similar to my journey. That was a great gift.

Second, Randy helped me gain perspective on some things I have often thought about. I have always known that friendship means the world to me. Randy and I agreed that along the way friends change and sometimes we change and thus the friendship itself changes. We lamented some of those lost friendships along the way. And we also rejoiced that new friends join us along the path, surprising gifts for a new stage in our life. I think Randy is one of those friends who comes along as a surprise, as a gift. And for that I am incredibly grateful.

Third, Randy and I both marveled at how God's providence has been with us throughout our lives. Randy from his days growing up in western Pennsylvania, and I from my days in East Texas. Both of us have experienced in a deeply existential what the Psalmist says, "Our times are in your hands." (Ps. 31:15) Both of us marvel that God has placed us in such wonderful congregations to serve-Randy at Las Vegas First United and I here at St. Andrew. How all this happened and how all this came to be is simply grace upon grace. Our times really are in God's hands.

So the times they are a-changing. That is certainly true. But even more true and more profound is this-through all the changing seasons and all the circling years, our times are in God's hands.

Thanks be to God. Amen.