

A Kairos Moment

16th Weekend in Kingdomtide – September 3/4, 2005

Sermon Background Study

Mark 1:14-18 (NRSV)

¹⁴Now after John was arrested, Jesus came to Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God, ¹⁵and saying, “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news.”

¹⁶As Jesus passed along the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and his brother Andrew casting a net into the sea—for they were fishermen. ¹⁷And Jesus said to them, “Follow me and I will make you fish for people.” ¹⁸And immediately they left their nets and followed him.

Acts 16:13-15 (NRSV)

¹³On the sabbath day we went outside the gate by the river, where we supposed there was a place of prayer; and we sat down and spoke to the women who had gathered there. ¹⁴A certain woman named Lydia, a worshiper of God, was listening to us; she was from the city of Thyatira and a dealer in purple cloth. The Lord opened her heart to listen eagerly to what was said by Paul. ¹⁵When she and her household were baptized, she urged us, saying, “If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come and stay at my home.” And she prevailed upon us.

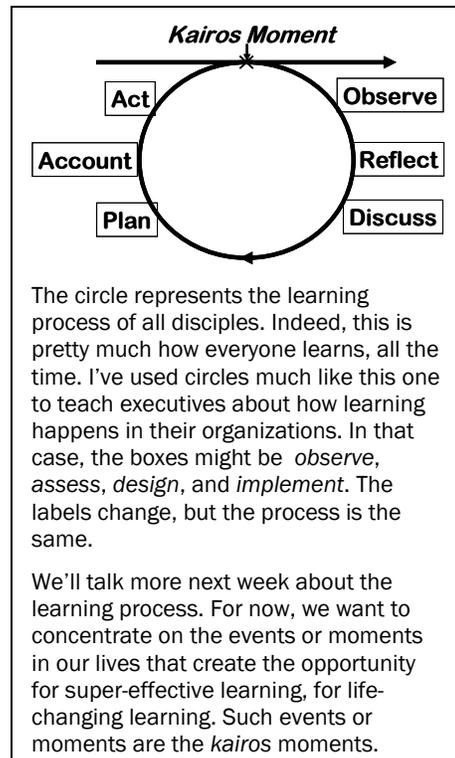
Today, we turn to another LifeShape®, the circle, as we consider those moments, large and small, in our lives when we are especially teachable, when God offers us the opportunity to learn, to change, and to grow.

Time

Time is such an odd thing. It seems so concrete, yet so elusive. A few years ago *Scientific American* did a big special issue on the subject of time. I was intrigued (amused?) that the cover article quoted St. Augustine at length three times. And he lived in the fifth century AD! The truth is that everyone knows what time is until they are asked to define. Though Einstein showed us that time is relative,² we can't really conceive how that could be. We can't really conceive of an existence without time. When C.S. Lewis speaks of God existing in the Eternal Now, I sort of understand what he is trying to say, but I can't really dump all my thoughts of *before* and *after*.

The ancient Greeks had two words to describe time and both are used in the New Testament. The first, *chronos*, looks familiar and means simply the passage of time or a period of time. See, for example, Acts 1:21.

The second time-oriented Greek word, *kairos*, is more interesting. In its nonbiblical use in ancient Greek, *kairos* most often refers to a decisive moment – positive or negative. *Kairos* is frequently used in the New Testament, nearly always referring to a decisive event or moment, often stressing the fact that the moment is divinely ordained.³ For example, the people of Jerusalem do not perceive the unique *kairos* when Jesus comes to them, “. . . you did not recognize the time (*kairos* in the original Greek) of your visitation from God” (Luke 19:44). The masses fail to see the unique *kairos* present with Jesus,



¹This sermon series draws upon the work of Mike Breen and Walt Kallestad, as presented in *A Passionate Life*. This book is available in *Inspiration*, the St. Andrew bookstore. Copies are also being sold in the Narthex on Sunday mornings.

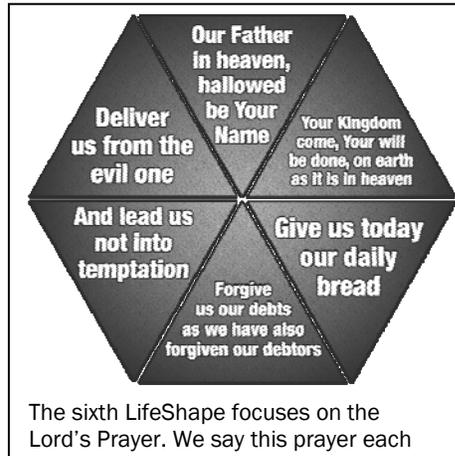
²Time passes slower for a moving object than a stationary one; time is not absolute. For example, an astronaut who spends 53.4 days in orbit, upon returning to earth is younger by a millisecond than he would be if he had never ventured into space (from Northwestern Univ.'s introductory physics class). The subject of time, what it is and how we perceive it, has theological implications, especially in topics like predestination, which is a time-based concept (notice the “pre”).

³from Kittel's *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, abridged by Bromiley.

“Why do you not know how to interpret the present time (*kairos*)?” (Luke 12:56). They do not understand that Jesus’ ministry is a decisive moment in time, a world-changing event like no other. And the *kairos* is God’s doing.

Two *kairos* moments

In Mark’s gospel, Jesus bursts onto the scene proclaiming, “The time (*kairos*) is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news” (Mark 1:15). God has reached into history and grabbed humanity. It is the moment that the Jews have awaited for centuries. It is the moment that the rest of humanity has desperately needed. Later, as Simon and Andrew work on the shore, they are confronted with a very personal *kairos* moment of their own. Jesus challenges them and, in response, the two brothers simply follow. They embrace the *kairos* and will be forever changed.



The sixth LifeShape focuses on the Lord’s Prayer. We say this prayer each week in worship, always risking that it becomes rote, that we say the words but never stop to truly pray them. Here are a few thoughts on these six phrases:

Our Father . . . hallowed be your name:
We are invited into an intimate parent/child relationship by a holy God.

Your kingdom come: Our charge as Jesus’ disciples is to build for God’s kingdom, to work for the day when the kingdom of God is the only kingdom anyone knows.

Give us today: How much we must enjoy worrying about tomorrow! But instead, we are to pray for today’s needs so that tomorrow we may pray again. In the wilderness, God provided the Israelites with food that rotted each night, so God could provide anew each morning.

Forgive us . . . as we have forgiven:
Jesus’ prayer assumes we’ve already done our own forgiving when we pray to be forgiven! Disciples of Christ are to extend grace to others generously and without hesitation.

Lead us not into temptation:
“Temptation” here means a time of testing or tribulation – *rescue us from the coming darkness, deliver us from evil*. Reflect on this some time: Jesus gave this prayer to his disciples, but when he prayed it himself in Gethsemane, the answer was “No.” Jesus was led to the testing, not away from it. And in his testing, lay the salvation of us all.

Our second Scripture passage is the story of Lydia, a wealthy woman from Thyatira (a city in Asia Minor, northeast of Ephesus). She and other women would meet near a city gate each Saturday (the Jewish Sabbath). There, on an otherwise ordinary day, she met Paul. Luke writes that “the Lord opened her heart.” She had a *kairos* moment and responded by eagerly listening to everything Paul had to say. She and her household were baptized into the Christian community.

Kairos and learning

We might think that the stories of Andrew’s and Lydia’s *kairos* moments have little to do with our own lives. After all, one was approached by Jesus and the other Paul! But we would be wrong. Jesus lived then and he lives now. God presents us all with *kairos* moments of our own. We may not see them for what they are and even if we do, we may not respond like Lydia. But such moments, the large and small events that shake us up, are opportunities to learn and to grow.

The truth about humans is that we are loathe to change, to adopt new attitudes and practices. It is hard to teach old dogs new tricks. *Kairos* moments are the teachable moments, the times when we are open to change. Sometimes, such moments are big, a potentially life-shaping event such as a divorce or a big promotion or the birth of a child. But sometimes, they are smaller, perhaps coming to us in surprising moments. Like Lydia’s encounter with Paul on that ordinary Saturday.

Mike Breen urges us to remember that *kairos* moments are never neutral. It may be a positive experience or a negative one. The question is what we will do with it. The *kairos* event is like a portal into the learning circle. Will we seize the moment and press on? Will we try to learn how we can grow from it? Or will we freeze up and stay the same old dog with the same old tricks? Divinely appointed defining moments, *kairos* moments, will come to each of us. We can ask ourselves *now*, how we will respond *then*.

Being a disciple, a passionate disciple, is to embrace learning. The process of an apprentice becoming like the master is lengthy and filled with lots of chances to turn back. In the same way, though the process of becoming ever more passionately Christ-like is never a straight line, it does always move forward. But more next week!

Daily Bible Readings

(more *Kairos* moments)

Before reading each passage, take a few minutes to get a sense of the context. Your study bible should help. Jot down a few questions that come to mind from your reading of the passage.

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| <p>Day 1 Genesis 45 When his brothers are presented before him, Joseph could have taken vengeance for their betrayal. Instead, here Joseph reveals himself to them and forgives them.</p> | <p>Day 2 Joshua 2 Rahab, a prostitute, chooses to protect Joshua's spies. She would go on to be a legendary heroine in Jewish lore.</p> |
| <p>Day 3 Esther 4 At the decisive moment in her life, Esther chooses to oppose Haman and intervene with the king to save her fellow Jews.</p> | <p>Day 4 Matthew 26:1-16 At his own <i>kairos</i> moment, Judas Iscariot makes a terrible choice.</p> |
| <p>Day 5 Acts 16:16-40 A jailer in Philippi comes to his own <i>kairos</i> moment.</p> | <p>Weekly Prayer Concerns</p> |

Sermon Notes

Fall Bible Academy begins in a week! The class schedule and registration is on-line at www.standrewcccl.org. Check it out!

This fall, the St. Andrew Bible Academy will be offering a large variety of classes at convenient times. Regardless of your personal Bible background there is a place for you in the Academy. The courses are designed to challenge those who are just beginning to explore the Bible and the Christian faith, as well as those who have been faithful students for many years. Classes begin the week of Sept. 12.

Classes include *Introducing the Bible: The Drama of Scripture*; *God Is Closer Than You Think*; *David: A Man After God's Own Heart*; *Genesis: The Beginning; Is That You, God?*; *Know Why You Believe*; *Why We Are Methodists*; and *Learning from Those Who Have Gone Before Us: A History Lesson on the Christian Church*.

Here are a few comments from people who have attended a Bible Academy class:

- "The class stimulated much thought and discussion around the dinner table! Great stuff."
- "This class is just what I needed. It has helped me to deepen my faith and to understand Jesus better."
- "I highly recommend these classes as I've learned more from them than I have anywhere else. I often recommend the classes to my friends and family."
- "This class makes me feel like I really belong to St. Andrew. This is such a great group and my week gets off to such a great start. I feel warm and refreshed every time we meet."
- "These classes are such a source of spiritual growth."

Questions for Discussion and Reflection

You might begin by talking about your own understanding of what we mean by a *kairos* moment. What distinguishes a *kairos* moment from other important moments in our lives? If a *kairos* moment is a teachable moment, how can we prepare ourselves to be good learners, to make the most of the opportunity presented to us? How do *kairos* moments help us to change?

You might share some stories of *kairos* moments in your own lives. What were they like? Was it a negative experience that created the *kairos* or was it a positive experience? Mike Breen says that strong emotions are often a key indicator of a *kairos* moment and that the events that trigger powerful negative emotions create the greatest opportunities for growth. Do you agree? What has been your own experience? Do we grow more from the difficulties in life than from the triumphs? Why?

God's role in all this is what sets apart the NT expression of *kairos* from the secular understanding of life-changing events. In the NT, the *kairos* marks God's activity. John Ortberg talks about divinely appointed defining moments. But if it is difficulties and negative experiences that often create the greatest opportunities for growth, does it necessarily mean that God ordained the difficulty in our lives? Might God use the hardship or difficulty to create a *kairos* moment that strengthens us and pulls us closer to him?