

Homily for 3rd Sunday in Ordinary Time

January 21-22nd 2017

Isaiah 8:23–9:3

Psalm 27:1, 4, 13–14

1 Corinthians 1:10–13, 17

Matthew 4:12–23 or Matthew 4:12–17

Kairos Moments in a Chronos World

I came across this list of answers children had given on a religion exam. Here are the best!

- **Noah's wife was called Joan of the Ark.**
 - **A myth is a female moth.**
- **Sometimes it is difficult to hear in church because the agnostics are so terrible.**
 - **The Pope lives in a vacuum.**
- **The Fifth Commandment is "Humor your father and mother."**

And then the winner:

Lot's wife was a pillar of salt by day and a ball of fire by night.

The point is: right answers are important, but so are right questions! The question I want to raise with you today is this: How do you measure the day to day unfolding of your life? This is the question presented in our readings from Isaiah and Matthew.

Let me explain what I mean by talking about the word "time".

The New Testament was written originally in Greek and the Greeks had two words for time. *chronos* and *kairos*. *Chronos*, which gives us our word chronology, is tick-tock time. Each second is exactly like the one that preceded and the one that follows it. It is boring time, humdrum time, drudgery time, meaningless time, empty time. Let me paint the picture of *chronos* time.

Imagine a convict in a prison cell; a lawyer with insomnia, who hears the unrelenting incessant ticking of a clock and she needs to be at court for 6:30 am; an office worker who hates his job and can't wait for 5:00 pm to come so he can get out of there; a college student in a 3-hour biology lab (right after lunch) all experience *chronos* time. *Chronos* time is empty time; it is a void that must be filled. It is time we must "put in" or endure. It's what we are talking about when, of all things, we talk about "killing" time. So, *chronos* equals tick-tock time, humdrum time, boring time, and routine time.

Thank God, there is another kind of time. It's called *kairos*. *Kairos* time is full time, vital time, crucial time, decisive time, God's time. *Kairos* moments are those powerful, extra-special moments that are packed with meaning. While *chronos* is tick-tock time, *kairos* is when time stands still.

Kairos is a key word in the New Testament. When Jesus started his ministry he came into Galilee preaching and saying:

"The time is fulfilled. The Kingdom is at hand. Repent and believe in the gospel."¹

I have just quoted the passage as it is found in Mark's Gospel. We heard the same pronouncement today as expressed by St. Matthew. The word for "time" there in Mark 1 was not *chronos*, it is *kairos*. This was crucial time, decisive time, God's time. Matthew does not use the word "Kairos" in his retelling. But this is the kind of time he had in mind. He makes this clear by quoting Isaiah and telling us the time the Prophet had spoken about is now fulfilled. Matthew understood that those words which had been written hundreds of years earlier were now being fulfilled in the *Kairos* moment of Jesus' inaugural sermon and his encounter with Peter, Andrew, James and John.

Our Old Testament Reading and Gospel for today help us to think about two dimensions of *kairos* moments in a *chronos* world:

- The Kairos Moment of Encouragement
- The Kairos Moment of Inspiration

1. The Kairos Moment of Encouragement.

The word "encourage" in French means to "put the heart in". How long has it been since you had a *kairos* moment of encouragement where you put the heart in somebody, or somebody put the heart in you? We see such encouragement expressed in the reading from Isaiah. Here we have reference made to two lands; the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali. These were territories that had been captured by the 8th century BC superpower Assyria. If ever people experienced the tick tock of *chronos* time it is when they are occupied by a foreign power and experiencing oppression. This monotony is captured when the Prophet writes:

But there will be no gloom for those who were in anguish. In the former time he brought into contempt the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali,

Anguish, gloom and contempt. All words that can weigh down a people and leave them ever more discouraged. But it is in this place that an opportunity for encouragement is born. Listen to the poetry of contrast:

***2The people who walked in darkness
have seen a great light;***

***those who lived in a land of deep darkness—
on them light has shined.***

Kairos moments in a *chronos* world is what Isaiah is getting at.

The Bible is God's *kairos* Good News of encouragement in the *chronos* bad news cycle of discouragement. Just think how many discouraging headlines we hear, see and read every day. I was listening to the CBC 7 am news the other day and in a ten minute news cast there was repeated

¹ Mark 1:15

references to death and murder. Think of how bleak so many of the headlines have been since President Trump's inauguration yesterday.

Everywhere we look and listen there are headlines declaring we are walking in darkness, gloom and anguish.

The Bible is the God's Good News coming from that other Kingdom... The kingdom of light breaking into this land of darkness. May you approach hearing the Bible with ears attentive to God's kairos time which is above and beyond the chronological time by which the nightly news is told and measured.

St. Paul speaks of the Bible as being Kairos encouragement when in Romans 15:4 he writes:

For whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, that by steadfastness and by the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope.

2. The Kairos Moment of Inspiration

This reference from Paul provides an appropriate bridge joining our Isaiah reading with Matthew. For here is Matthew living seven hundred years after Isaiah. In introducing Jesus' ministry he refers to this prophetic oracle. He associates the beginning of Jesus' ministry with a Kairos moment of inspiration. He does this by locating Jesus' address, Capernaum, as being in that ancient land of Zebulun and Naphtali:

Jesus left Nazareth and made his home in Capernaum by the sea, in the territory of Zebulun and Naphtali, 14 so that what had been spoken through the prophet Isaiah might be fulfilled

I want you to grasp the significance of this detail. It was in a place that had so experienced the monotony living in a chronos world that Jesus breakings in to announce a Kairos moment of inspiration.

17 From that time Jesus began to proclaim, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near."

Now the word for time here is more in keeping with calendar time. But get this! Jesus by calling people to repentance is saying, there is another kind of time I am announcing because there is another kind of kingdom.

The kingdoms of this world measure everything according to chronology... That is in part why we need such cumbersome bureaucracies, there is so much to manage. Chronos time by its character needs such management. The other thing about the kingdoms of this world, because they exist in Chronos time, they are temporary. Think of our neighbours to the south. Eight years ago it looked like the Democrats were established and secure and reporters we singing notes of optimism. Now many of those same reporters are singing laments. Only 16 States have democratic governors and all three levels of the Federal Government are controlled by Republicans.

The point I am making is not to favour democrats or republicans – but to illustrate that in this world chronos power is always shifting power, always in flux and changing.

How different is Kairos time, for here things are measured according to God's time, which is not in flux but eternal. Let me illustrate this with a picture.

This is Notre Dame Cathedral in Paris which is situated on the Ile de la Cité, an island in the middle of the Seine. The nave (from the Latin *navis* meaning "boat" or thing of the word "navy") is surrounded by high

walls, which in turn are supported by flying buttresses, which look, for all the world, like oars coming out the side of a ship.



The Church is often called the Barque of Peter, which is another word for ship. Jesus called Peter, Andrew, James and John to leave their boats by the Lake of Genessert because he had another fishing trip in store for them. He was calling them to set sail across the waters of a chronos world and fish for people so they could come to know this other kingdom and other way of measuring time. Regardless therefore of the day on the calendar the Church is always moving through the waters of history and this world's kingdoms, announcing with Jesus that the time has come. Look, hear and respond..

The Kairos Kingdom is at hand. Come on board as we are inspired by the encouragement of God's Good News to set our course towards heaven's shore..... For in that land there will no longer be chronos time. Kairos time will be all we know. There we will forever sing:

**3You have multiplied the nation,
you have increased its joy;
they rejoice before you
as with joy at the harvest,
as people exult when dividing plunder.**

It is this kingdom and this way of viewing time that the Church is called to announce regardless of who is governing the chronological unfolding of history. In 2017 may we be inspired and encouraged at St. Peter's to see this as Peter's Barque, Peter's ship and the Catholic Church as Peter's Navy. For it is from the Barque of Peter that we can experience and know Kairos moments and so live meaningfully and purposefully in a chronos world.