

Living in the Chronos & the Kairos
The Monroe Congregational Church, UCC
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2 Samuel 7:1-17

You and I share the same sixty seconds, the same sixty minutes, and the same 24 hours of each day. How we experience those seconds, minutes, and hours can depend on so many things: our age, our personality, our sense of mortality.

Time is a concept the writers of the Bible knew something about. In fact, they had two different words for it: chronos and kairos.

Chronos is the time fabricated by humans; the clock so many of us imprison ourselves to that says we have to be up at 5:30, take lunch at 12, and be home for dinner by 6. Chronos reminds us that a national election is only 15 days away (I know, not soon enough!).

Kairos, however is much different. Translated from the Greek, kairos means *"the right, opportune or supreme moment"*. It is God's time, holy time. Kairos is the unfolding of history and God's actions in our lives, and is not dependent upon our clocks or calendars or other ways we measure the passage of time.

It was my great-grandmother who first gave me a sense of kairos. When I was a little girl, my parents would drop me off to stay with her on the little farm she owned with my great-grandfather. Among many other household arts, Gram taught me how to make bread.

Into a big, blue mixing bowl we combined yeast, warm water, a little sugar, melted butter and flour. Then she put me to work kneading the dough, squishing it through my fingers, flour up to my elbows, until she told me I had kneaded long enough. Then she'd take the dough, and pat it into a round shape, cover it with a towel and tell me...*"Now we wait."*

Do you know how much the average 7 year old likes to wait? Not very much. Making bread with Gram was an exercise in patience. We had to wait for the yeast to rise and work its magic in the dough. Underneath the towel a small miracle was happening, and it couldn't be rushed.

Kairos is the time it takes for yeast to make the dough rise. It cannot be controlled, manipulated, or forced into a network news time slot.

We experience kairos in today's reading.

It seemed like a good idea to everyone. David, the king of Israel, decided a change needed to be made. Nathan, his pastor, thought it sounded like a good idea. It seemed the least that a righteous king could do for God.

For about five hundred years, their worship of God centered on the tabernacle, which was a movable tent-like structure containing the Ark of the Covenant, built by Moses, containing the tablets he had been given on Mt Sinai. It was made to be portable because the Israelites were always on the move. From the moment they were liberated from slavery in Egypt to entering the land God had promised them, they were a wandering people.

But now, they had settled down. Those wilderness travels were part of the distant past. So David decided to build a more permanent structure in Jerusalem. He would build God's house, or temple: a magnificent building to show to the entire world how wonderful God is and what God has done.

But later that night in a vision, God gave Nathan a message to pass onto David, revealing a very different time line.

God said "Why do you think I need a house right now? I've been doing things just fine, moving about in complete freedom, bringing the people out of Egypt, being wherever you are. Instead of worrying about what you can build for me, let me build for you an amazing legacy. When the time is right, I'll have one of your offspring build a place for me. But now is not the time."

You have to wonder why, when David was all good and ready, pumped and excited to build God a temple that God said, "No."

We're never told why in this passage, but later, in the Book of Chronicles, an older David retells this story to the son who DID build the temple, Solomon, saying that because he had fought so many wars he had too much blood on his hands to build such a sacred structure.¹ Perhaps that is to remind us that the building itself was meant to establish peace.

¹ 1 Chronicles 22:6-10

Instead, God promises David another legacy, one that is passed along many generations until it reaches forward to Jesus, the Prince of Peace. As Christians, the body of Jesus in the world today, we are that legacy.

Now, you wouldn't necessarily know that if you have been paying attention to the news today. Ask the typical American what Christianity is all about, and they may point to a protestor holding up grisly signs and screaming at young women on their way into a Planned Parenthood facility to get a low-cost annual exam and say "that's a Christian".

Or they may describe the Christian campus organization InterVarsity, whose reach includes over 600 schools and 1,000 chapters, with revenues of over \$100 million, and 1,500 employees. InterVarsity recently published a statement of theology that excludes not only LGBT persons from participation and employment, but also those who are allies.

But the defining expression of Christianity is love;
the defining act of Christianity is hospitality;
the defining responsibility of Christianity is to stand with the people at the margins, the vulnerable, the abused, and the abandoned;
and the defining role of a Christian is to be an advocate and an ally.

This is how my Christian parents raised me;
This is what I was taught in my Christian Sunday school;
This is what I learned in my Christian Seminary;
This is what I have witnessed from Christian activists;
This is what my denomination- the United Church of Christ - requires of me;
This is what Christian scripture reveals to me.

Our legacy as Christians is love.

But some days I grow tired waiting in the kairos for us to make our identity known as people who will wage peace, and love, and hospitality and hope. I am weary of wrestling the name "Christian" from the fear and hatred and exclusion of a vocal minority. Maybe you get tired, too.

We have been given a legacy of love - hate and exclusion is NOT who we are.

Instead of building a grand temple, God encouraged David to sit back, relax, and enjoy the miracle of what they had accomplished together and to trust that at the right time, one of his kin will do the job.

David is free to squander or treasure the time he has left. Now, that sounds good to me, but I can't help detecting a sense of melancholy as David accepts the stark reality that he will be long dead before the grand vision is fulfilled. And it isn't the first time this has happened in our narrative arch.

Abraham and Sarah were told their family will be as numerous as the stars in the sky and will bless all the peoples of the world, and yet Sarah dies with having only given birth to one child, never to experience the joys of being the matriarch of a large extended family.

Moses was called to lead the people through the wilderness and into the Promised Land, but he never made it there himself. After 40 years of leading, preparing and empowering the people, he only catches a glimpse of the Promised Land from a distant mountaintop before he dies.

Like Sarah, Moses and King David, we are all in the process of "becoming", continuing to learn what is loving and good, and what will bring peace and stability so that we learn how to live in, not against, God's own good time.

It's such a difficult concept; one that hits us right in our sense of mortality. We will never see or be fully aware of the difference we have made in other people's lives. But just because God's kairos doesn't always fit into our chronos does not mean that we stop speaking up, or that we give up or lose hope. Amen.