

CHANGING TIME

LUKE 2:22-40

DECEMBER 31, 2023

Rev. John R. Annable, University Baptist Church

Over the last few years, you have heard me complain every now and then about how time goes by so quickly. I have been assured by many that I am not the only one that feels that way. It does not make me feel all that much better, however, when I am told that a person of some wisdom was quoted as having said, *“The reason time flies, is that we are always trying to kill it.”*

I really don't like to think about the possibility that time seems so elusive to me because I wasted it away or killed a lot of it not comprehending the possibilities of the moment. As you look at how you spend your time have you ever had the feeling that you have wasted away a good bit of your life because you have not really lived a good bit of your life—you have just watched time go by?

This morning, we are on the verge of what we get all excited about—that is the taking down of one calendar and putting up a new one. Of course, we don't do that all that much these days. We have smart phones that are smart enough to make us constantly aware of the passing of seconds, minutes, hours, days, months, years, and even centuries, but not smart enough to make us constantly aware of the value of even so much as a second of the time we live. So, maybe it is good for us to take a look at time and how we perceive time, how we use it, wisely or not so wisely, how we value it or misuse it regularly.

And to do that I invite you to think about the text I read to you from Luke's gospel this morning.

The excitement and festivities of Christmas are over. The mystery and wonder of the nativity have faded and the Christmas decorations have been put away or it is now very high on our agendas of things to do quickly. Now is a good time for us to ponder the meaning of the wonder that has taken place among us.

Christ has been born in Bethlehem. We have heard again the scriptures that told of his coming and birth and we have enjoyed the songs of Christmas. But—even so--what has changed? The world continues in its path, upward or downward, that's in dispute. We return to our predictable routines that we followed before we ran head-long into what we have become fond of calling the holidays.

Outside the church, it's New Year's Eve this Sunday. As an old year ends and a new one begins, what's Christmas got to do with newness among us?

In our text for this morning the Holy Family is no longer with the shepherds and the angels. Instead, they are engaged in the round of activities related to their faith. Mary and Joseph are now getting on with the business of childrearing back in Nazareth. This is the Sunday when we return to the more mundane, humdrum round of daily life. We are already in today's scripture dealing with the happenings of a pre-teen Jesus. (Isn't it interesting that in Luke 2:22-40, we have the only report of Jesus's childhood.)

At Jesus's birth, an angel declared his future greatness. Now, at age twelve, he is declared a wonder by the teachers of the law (2:46-47). Aged Simeon and Anna, inspired by the Holy Spirit (vv. 25-27) see in the infant Jesus hope for the people of Israel, a cause for the falling and rising of many. An older generation of the faithful testify to God's future brought about through this child.

Inspired by the Holy Spirit, Simeon says to Mary, *“This boy is assigned to be the cause of the falling and rising of many in Israel and to be a sign that generates opposition so that the inner thoughts of many will be revealed”* (Luke 2:34-35).

In this episode at the temple, we see the newest generation and a passing generation joined, standing on the threshold. Older adult Simeon holds a baby and sees into the future, predicting that the babe signifies a genuine change in the course of history that *“generates opposition.”*

Simeon expresses not only thanksgiving and joy as he holds the child in his aged arms but also foreboding. He prophesies a painful truth that Mary and Joseph carry with them back home to Nazareth in Galilee (Luke 2:39). God's favor may be upon this child but that does not extricate the child or his family from the challenges of life in this world. With Mary's joy comes also a "sword" that shall pierce her heart. Here, in Simeon's song, the nativity of Christ is connected with the crucifixion of Christ. Sometimes being the recipient of "God's favor" leads to great pain when the world rejects God's truth and grace.

Yet the good news, as Simeon says, is that the favor of God is upon this child (Luke 2:40). Our prayers for deliverance are being answered. However, along with good news about the future, there also comes the bad news that the future brought by this child will not be painless.

Our past and future—with one another and with God—are somehow encapsulated in this old man, Simeon, holding in his arms a baby who shall change the course of human history.

So, for us today here in our church, it's the First Sunday of Christmastide. We're halfway through the Twelve Days of Christmas and Christmastide is supposed to still be in full swing. But outside these walls, it's New Year's Eve.

New Year's has never been a big deal in the church. Although in some churches I have served we had what we called a Watch Night Service as a substitute for the parties that often lead some to problems and loss. Even though our calendar has its roots in the church and was invented by a church leader, the Bible knows nothing of our calendar or way of marking time. There is no *New Year's Eve* party to be found in scripture.

I wonder if New Year's Day is, for many of us, an unhappy holiday. People look back on the passing year and have regrets. Maybe 2023 did not treat them well. Perhaps there were losses, disappointments, or tragedies. They would rather forget the past year than commemorate its passing.

Perhaps New Year's is an unhappy time for them because of their fears and apprehensions about the coming year. 2023 had its challenges. Will 2024 be worse? Will it be an Unhappy New Year to us all.

That's my theory for why so many overindulge in alcohol during New Year's. New Year's Eve is a time known for drunken parties, an evening when it's unsafe to be on the roads after midnight. If New Year's is so happy, why do so many need to drown their sorrows?

The church year (the church's way of keeping time), unlike the world's year, begins, as we noted a few Sundays ago, with Advent, with preparation for the coming of Christ. It's as if we say the year begins, that time makes a fresh start with Jesus. Not with the flipping of one month to the next, but with Jesus it all begins.

Jesus is God Almighty making a new beginning, a fresh start with humanity. Jesus Christ is our New Year.

As we stand on the threshold of the end of one year and the beginning of another, I think it is striking that Luke connects older people to the possibility of unanticipated divine intervention. They have many years on them, but they point toward God's radical new future, as in, "*Your young will see visions. Your elders will dream dreams.*" (Acts 2:17). In the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, the elderly are called to be dreamers. The Holy Spirit is a gift that keeps pointing the elderly toward visions of tomorrow rather than leaving them to wallow in memories of yesterday.

Here we stand at the beginning of a New Year. But we stand here, not alone. Christ has been born among us, one of us, God with us. We can't know what the future holds but we, because of witnesses like Luke's Gospel, because of visionary prophets like Simeon and Anna, know who holds the future. Whatever the New Year will be, it will not be left entirely up to us. God goes with us, active, resourceful.

As this Sunday's Gospel ends, "*When Mary and Joseph had completed everything required by the Law of the Lord, they returned to their hometown, Nazareth in Galilee. The child grew up and became*

strong. He was filled with wisdom, and God's favor was on him" (Luke 1:39-40).

And so, after our celebration of the incarnation, Christmas, the church gathers and focuses upon the future, the coming year. And what do we see? We see an old man from the past holding in his arms a baby who takes us into the future. The year that lies before us is not really in our hands. It's also in the hands of that baby whom Simeon holds up before the temple.

That's why we can say, as we participate in a holiday that really isn't really Christian, in the deepest sense of the words, Happy New Year!

There are phrases we use to help us understand this concept of CHANGING TIME.

Chronos time is how we measure our days and our lives quantitatively

But Chronos time will eat us alive if we do not constantly keep track of it and try to control it

The other kind of time is Kairos time. The time the bible speaks of when, for example, the writer of Ecclesiastes tell us there is a time and place for everything under the sun. There is he tells us a time to plant and a time to reap what we have planted.

The Apostle Paul tells us about the coming of the Kingdom of God being a Kairos moment, the appropriate moment—something that has meaning it is coming now BUT calls us to live in a new kind of time.

A Kairos moment can open up anywhere... It can be as minute as recognizing that sudden need to take a walk in the fresh air to clear your head, trusting that such a simple act of self-care is not a waste of time, but time you can afford. Meditation, leisurely reading, walks, staring out the window, fishing, gazing at art, dancing, slow cooking, conversations of intentional listening, acting in the moment when your intuition speaks – all these keep you attentive, open and in tune in the present moment where you can live rather than kill time.

Chronos is how we think of time—as we measure it on clocks, seconds, minutes, hours, etc. It is measurable time. Kairos time is different. It teaches us something vital about God's kingdom and trusting God's timing.

What Does Kairos' Meaning Teach Us about the Kingdom of God? Jesus talks about how Kairos relates to the kingdom of God.

"Some of the Pharisees asked Jesus, 'When will God's kingdom come?' Jesus answered, 'God's kingdom is coming, but not in a way that you can see it. People will not say, "Look, God's kingdom is here!" or "There it is!" No, God's kingdom is here with you.'" (Luke 17:20-21)

The kingdom of God did not come in the way we would naturally expect. It came in Kairos time. The kingdom of God came at the proper moment.

And yet, at the same time, it is not fully here. The kingdom of God appeared on earth at the proper moment, yet it is still on its way as we wait for its ultimate fulfillment. It will be fully completed in Kairos time—in God's time. We will live those moments of Kairos time when we look for God's Spirit moving in our lives day in and day out.

The way I see it, Christmastide, is Kairos time. Everybody looks forward to Christmas, counts the days, loves the songs and the good cheer. The Sunday after Christmas, well, that feels more like *Chronos* time, when there are tree trimmings to be boxed up and lugged to the attic for twelve months of storage, and lights to be unplugged and put away, and trash to be hauled to the curb, and pounds to be dropped from holiday overindulgence, and back to the office on Monday. It was a good time while it lasted, now it's back to the everyday.

But this Sunday, the Sunday after Christmas, as we plod back into ordinary, Chronos time—with the stuff to be put away, and the bills to be paid, and the children to be gotten off to school, and the office to be reentered and ordinary life to be resumed, and church to be endured even when it can't be as great as

it was last Sunday—let’s allow Luke to tell us of an event which has taken place in our time that fundamentally changes our time.

In the incarnation, God has taken time for us.

My friends, “Every Kairos is a Chronos, but not every Chronos is a Kairos.” — Hippocrates once wrote.

Speaking of my own experience, I often feel like I’m pressed for time, and I get impatient when I waste my time standing in an endless line or I am down at Mill Street and University waiting for the stoplight to change. Often, I am the only person at that stop light when I come to church in the morning. Yet, most of the time I am required to sit there for minutes as the light go through some cycle known only to it and the engineers who program the signal but who never, themselves seem to have to sit there on a regular basis.

We go to a lot of expense to put sensors in the concrete at the approach to that light and then develop a system that totally makes them useless. If I am not careful I can let Chronos time get the better of me. I could, for example, instead of letting the light frustrate me, take the opportunity to take a drink of the hot coffee that sets in my coffee mug there in the console and simply enjoy it. Or I could take a moment to remember what I am on my way to church to do—to try and find some ways to tell the folk about Kairos time—God coming to us in the baby and suggest ways to reorder our lives to live less in Chronos time and more in the appropriate moments that God has provided for us to welcome His Kingdom in us. I would love for someone to do a study of how our frustration at having to just set at lights or in traffic raise our blood pressure and then see when we are trying to live in the changed time—Kairos time—what it would look like.

Christmas teaches of experiencing the joy that comes to the world with the birth of the Christ. He came proclaiming the coming of a new Kingdom, a new way of living in this world consumed with watching the clock and marking the calendar. We are called to not let our days be consumed with hate—but Kairos love. Not with anxiety—but with Kairos peace like a river. Not with no hope—but filled with the dreams of dreamers who envision a new way.

Let us in our Kairos dreams follow the guidance of the shepherds in the field. You recall last week the scripture which said: *“And suddenly there was with the angels a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying, “Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace among those he favors!”*

When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, “Let us go now Bethlehem and see this thing that has taken place, which the Lord had made known to us.” So, they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the child lying in the manger.

This child would call us to be the ones to proclaim to the world we are not living in a changed time where God is at work and will be so in us when we find something more exciting to do with our Chronos moments, of watching the minutes slip by. We have been called to a new life to live abundantly in this day the Lord has provided for us!