

“Time to Wake Up”

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Romans 13: 8-14

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It's 2:30 in the morning and you are suddenly woken up by the telephone ringing — or maybe it's an Amber Alert breaking through your 'Do Not Disturb' setting. Before you even get to looking at your phone to see what the disturbance is all about or who's calling, the first thing you blurt out is “What time is it?”

When the phone goes off in the middle of the day we don't respond “What time is it?” but when we are in the middle of a deep sleep and we are suddenly jarred out of it, we need something to ground us in reality, and time is what helps to ground us. After all, if it's a phone call at 2:30am, something must be wrong. But if it's a phone call at 8:30am you probably overslept and someone is wondering where you are.

Some people wake up fresh as a daisy, ready to take on the day ... and others need be dragged out of bed. Someone asked me if I wake up grumpy in the morning. My answer was ‘No, I don't, I prefer to let him sleep just a little longer.’ 😊

In our text for today, we use the words of Paul to prepare us for the Advent season. Paul says, “*You know what time it is, how it is now the moment for you to wake from sleep. For salvation is nearer to us now than when we became believers; the night is far gone, the day is near.*” (Romans 13:11-12)

Advent is a time of preparing. As Christians we are preparing for the birth of Jesus ... not just to remember the first time Jesus came to earth, but also to remember that he will come again. As we always say in our communion liturgy: “Christ has died. Christ is Risen. Christ will come again.” Part of Advent is reflecting on the time when Jesus will come again and restore all creation to the purpose of heaven.

But it's interesting that in Greek — the language that Paul wrote his letters in — when he used the word ‘time’ (“You know what *time* it is”) he did not use the word “chronos” but instead he used the word “kairos”. Chronos is time like on a clock. When we wake up at 2 in the morning and say “What time is it”? We want to know what the clock says.

Kairos', on the other hand, is God's time. Kairos is about the right time — the fullness of time. In Mark 1:15 it reads “The *time* (the Kairos) is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near.”

Chronos is sequential and quantitative; Kairos is more about quality and being the appointed moment. God is always more interested in kairos than in chronos. I think we on the other hand tend to be more interested in chronos. We think ‘How long is the sermon going to take this morning?’ instead of ‘How will God meet me this morning?’

I was given a Bougainvillea plant a year ago last summer. It’s large for a house plant, but because it was a gift, I kept it inside and looked after it over the winter and then put it outside in the summer in a bright but partly shady location. Then I watered it, I fertilized it ... and nothing! All summer long all I got were nice green leaves. Maybe I over-fertilized, I don’t know. Some plants do need a little stress to bloom. At the very end of our longer than usual outdoor season I saw one tiny bloom at the end of the leaf. I was thinking to myself “What a waste of effort that was!”, and I was trying to decide whether it was worth keeping it indoors for another season – it’s pretty big and thorny too. But I brought it back inside. Small blooms kept coming. And by November it was in full bloom!



Some of you will know that November is my least favourite month. I would take 2 Januarys over one November — it’s the dark and dreariness of November that gets to me — the shortening of days and the grey skies. But it was all through dreary November that I have had spectacular Bougainvillea blooms. For me that was a *kairos* event. It didn’t bloom when I expected it to bloom or when I wanted it to bloom — in the summer when everything else was blooming. It bloomed in its own time, and it bloomed in God’s time, and that time turned out to be the time I needed those blooms the most.

We had a wonderful Celebrate Life Service last Sunday night in spite of the fact that it was Grey Cup Sunday, and in spite of the fact that the speaker totally forgot she was to speak that night. Laura Tobin took to the mic and led us in a wonderful reflection jumping off from the story of Blind Bartimaeus, who asks Jesus to restore his sight. The question that Laura asked was “What do you need from Jesus?” and “If you met Jesus, what would you ask him for?” Person after person spoke up in personal and meaningful ways and shared what it is they need or had asked for from Jesus.

One spoke of forgiveness and being transformed by being able to forgive. Another spoke of having had a strong faith as a child, but then as a teenager and into adult years somehow forgot about faith and ended up

going down a destructive path. But recently, after someone nagged him for a while, he finally started coming to Celebrate Life ... and though he didn't use these words exactly, the impression I have from what he said was that he was awake again – his faith had been re-awakened, and that's what he wanted more than anything.

Those were *kairos* moments of recognizing the presence of God and where heaven has come to earth.

You now have 24 days to get ready for Christmas ... but this Advent I would like you to try as much as possible to live in God's time, and to be ready and awake to meet with God to prepare for Christ's arrival.

Tuning our hearts and our spirit to God is what we need to do, and there is a sense of urgency to this.

We often attach urgency to the things of *chronos*. When it comes to the first Sunday of Advent, I sometimes feel like I have a stop watch in my brain with the words ringing in my ears: "On your mark. Get set. Go!" so that I can accomplish all the Christmas tasks that my work, my family and community place on my to-do list. We are used to urgency with the clock. I actually think we have an addiction to rushing around and being so worried about the time. I know I do. It's funny because God has been working on that with me.

My husband decided it would be a great idea to put an app on our phones from our car insurance company. For three months (with our permission) the app tracks our driving patterns. They tell us you can't have your insurance go up doing this, but it can result in your insurance going down. So for 100 days it marks when I am speeding, when I am breaking too hard or accelerating too fast, or if I pick up my phone (distracted driving!) I thought I was going to go mental. I nearly did the first couple of days, but now I have just plain slowed down and become a gentler driver. And you know what? I feel more relaxed! That could be a *kairos* thing too ... because I'll let you in on a secret: when you are stressed and irritable, it's a lot harder to connect to God.

We are used to urgency with *chronos* time. But for Paul, there was an urgency to recognizing God's time. I don't know if opening your heart to God ever feels urgent the way that rushing to the dentist does. (And what time do you need to go to the dentist? At 2:30 (tooth hurting!)) The ways of God don't feel urgent, but they are.

I think of the need to make changes so that our grandchildren and great-grandchildren have a healthy planet to live on. Part of the reason it's so hard to change our habits is that 1) it costs us – we actually have to change and that hurts; and 2) the scientists tell us it's urgent, but it doesn't

feel urgent. Fixing the issues of climate change is just so big. But I think we are beginning to wake up and realize the night is far gone and that we had better start making some changes even if it hurts us now.

Connecting to God and being open to the changes God wants us to make rarely feels urgent. But I believe it is. A couple of weeks ago I talked about the shocking statistics about many mainline churches not existing in 20 years. Friends, the need is so great in our community and our world! There is so much poverty, there is so much loneliness, there are so many who fall through the cracks where we think the government is or ought to be helping, but for whatever reason they are not. A living and vibrant church that shines with the light and the love of God is desperately needed.

There is a small passage in the book of 1 Samuel. Samuel the prophet is a small child and he is about to hear God speaking to him in the temple. The description of that time leading up to the call of Samuel talks about that time as one where “the lamp of God had not yet gone out and visions were rare in those days”. We are in those days again, particularly in this country ... and if we are not careful, the lamp of God could go out.

If you hesitate to connect to Jesus for yourself, even sensing that it would change you and make you less irritable and help you to have more peace, joy and love, then do it for the community that needs you. Do it for your great-grandchildren who need the church to not just be a flickering light, but a bonfire of hope and life.

In this season of Advent live more in *kairos* than *chronos*. Know that whatever challenges you, whatever you have going on in your life, whatever you have been praying for — know that God has heard your prayer and longs to meet you and to answer you in his *kairos* time.

May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit. (Romans 15:13)

Thanks be to God, Amen.