

This Passing World

1 Corinthians 7:29-31

Mark 1:14-20

We are only a few weeks into the new year and already I hear folks saying, “Where did the time go?” Maybe you feel it, too. It makes me think of this little ditty from Dr. Suess:

How did it get so late so soon? It’s night before it’s afternoon.

December is here before it’s June. My goodness how the time has flown. How did it get so late so soon?

Wendy McFadden, in her editorial in the January/February issue of *Messenger* magazine, writes about time and how we experience it. Our choices are *Chronos*, the linear, quantitative kind we’re most likely familiar with. Seconds turn into minutes, minutes into hours, hours into days, days into weeks, weeks into months, and, eventually, months into years. Fairly straightforward. The other kind is *Kairos* and perhaps less familiar to folks. Our friends at Merriam-Webster tell us that Kairos is “a time when conditions are right for the accomplishment of a crucial action : the opportune and decisive moment.”

In the Gospel of Mark almost every event is seen as an opportune or decisive moment. There is always a sense of urgency to everything that happens. The reading in Mark starts with the announcement that John

the Baptist had been arrested. This foreshadows Jesus' own arrest, even as his ministry is just getting started. The time is short!

As Jesus walked along the shore, he called to these men who immediately left their livelihoods, and even their families, to follow him. We aren't even given the impression that they questioned why they should follow. They needed to act now; the time was short! I wonder what it was about Jesus that allowed them to make such a life changing decision in what seems no more than the blink of an eye. Jesus had barely begun his ministry, yet here are these four willing to leave everything behind to follow him. Mark, in his immediacy to move on to the next event, doesn't offer an explanation. The time was too short.

In the middle of working on this message, I received a phone call from the Executive Director of the facility where I work. She said, "I realize this is your day off, but we have an opportunity to do something and the time is short. We need your help so please think about this and call me back in 30 minutes." While the opportunity she was talking about isn't as world changing as the inbreaking kingdom of God, we are still called today to hurry up, the time is short.

Jesus said to the first disciples that the "time is fulfilled". Kairos time had been fulfilled. The time for the advent of the kingdom of God on earth had come. Chronos time had finally given way to Kairos time. Thousands of years of waiting was over, God's kingdom had come in the person of Jesus Christ. The time was now to decide to follow, to

leave the past, the old ways behind. Did those men who first answered Jesus' call realize that their decision to follow Him meant that their old lives would pass away, the world as they knew it would pass away?

It would be many years later that Paul would write to the church at Corinth. As we read the words that Paul wrote to the Corinthians, we get a sense that time is running short for the early believers. In Paul's worldview Christ's return was imminent. He was exhorting believers to be prepared for that event. Life could not be lived as it had been, the time was too short, the world they knew was passing away.

As we look at Paul's admonitions, they can seem akin to what we have been living this past year. Because of COVID some who are married have had to live as if they were not. Quarantine protocols call for separations. Those who mourn have been asked to simply go on with their lives until the time is right to be able to gather for our normal mourning rituals. For those who are joyful, the pain and suffering of others in their circle will cause them to refrain from rejoicing. And all the material possessions in the world amount to naught when you can't save a loved one from succumbing to the disease of COVID. In many ways, we have come to feel that the time is short. We see this evidenced in the stories of people who have reconnected with family members they have been estranged from for years for fear this would be their last chance to do so.

Life today is again reminding us that the time is short. If we are to be a part of the kingdom of God now is the time to act. Just as the first disciples, we are asked to follow and to follow NOW. C.S. Lewis understood this urgency to follow Christ, as evidenced by this excerpt from his book, *The Screwtape Letters*:

There is a legend about Satan and his imps planning their strategy for attacking the world that's hearing the message of salvation.

One of the demons says, "I've got the plan, master. When I get on the earth and take charge of people's thinking, I'll tell them there's no heaven."

The devil responds, "Ah, they'll never believe that. This Book of Truth is full of messages about the hope of heaven through sins forgiven. They won't believe that. They know there's a glory yet future."

On the other side of the room another says, "I've got the plan. I'll tell 'em there's no hell."

"No good," he says. "Jesus, while He was on earth, talked more of hell than of heaven. They know in their hearts that their wrong will have to be taken care of in some way. They deserve nothing more than hell."

And one brilliant little imp in the back stood up and said, “Then I know the answer. I’ll just tell them there’s no hurry.” And he’s the one Satan chose.

There are many in the world today who think there is still time. Yet young or old, we don’t know how much time we have. While we may not expect God’s kingdom to fully break in here on earth in our lifetimes, the time *is* growing shorter. Each of us with every passing day grows closer to the end of our own lives. This knowledge can give us both a sense of freedom and a sense of urgency in our Christian walk. We see that things in our lives – relationships, those things that cause us grief or joy, our possessions, even our dealings with the world around us are among those things that are passing away. None of these are permanent. As Christians the recognition of the transience of earthly things should not drive us to despair. Instead, it allows us to live with them “as though not”. We may still enjoy these elements of our daily lives, yet with a freedom induced by recognizing their impermanence in our lives. We are no longer defined by these things; our identity lies in our relationship to Christ.

As we view the world that is passing away, and understanding that the time is short, we are now free to fulfill our calling as Christ’s followers. Peter, Andrew, James, and John were called to be fishers of people. That remains our calling as well. We are to proclaim Jesus Christ, to

work to build up God's kingdom on earth, and in so doing bring glory to God.

When we grasp the urgency shared by both Mark and Paul with their messages of the time of God's kingdom come (Kairos) and the shortness of the time available to us (Chronos), as well as the great hope that lies before us, we can accomplish the task to which we have been called as believers in Jesus. May it be so.

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