

Voices: Waiting times or wasted times? A theology of time in a pandemic

June 16, 2020

“When am I finally going to graduate?” “When am I going to get married?” “When am I going to find a job?” “When am I going to get that raise I’ve been promised?” “When will I ever get over this disease I’ve been battling for years?”

Waiting times and waiting games are some of the most difficult and challenging times we encounter as we navigate our way through this precarious journey called life.

Since mid-March, we all have been mired in one long, frustrating and now very costly waiting time. We’ve been wondering when this crazy coronavirus pandemic will end. For our generation, this season will be remembered as perhaps the most devastating corporate and personal waiting time in our nation’s history.

Waiting times are tough times, but our waiting times do not have to be wasted times if we understand God’s perspective on waiting and time.

Two kinds of time

Two Greek words are used for “time” in the Bible. One is *chronos*. *Chronos* is quantitative or linear time. It’s the passing of seconds, minutes, hours, days, months and years.

Chronos is the time beckoning us to get up at 8 a.m., be in class by 9 a.m., squeeze in a lunch at noon, finish homework by 11 or 12 p.m.—or 1 or 2

a.m. This is the time that so often entraps and enslaves us.

The other word is *kairos*, a whole different kind of time. *Kairos* is qualitative and nonlinear. *Kairos* means “opportunity” or “a fitting or opportune time.” It’s a “season” kind of time.

The Byrds, in their famous song from the 1960s, quote directly from Ecclesiastes 3:1: “To everything there is a season, and a time to every purpose under heaven.” They capture the essence of *kairos*. There’s a right “season” for everything, especially from heaven’s point of view.

In the Bible, *kairos* describes the fitting, appointed, opportune and perfect time in the plans and purposes of God. It’s when God intervenes and acts. It is *carpe diem* kind of time.

It’s imperative we see the difference between *kairos* and *chronos*. While God created both, which one of these kinds of time do we think he most particularly is interested in when it comes to his relationship and interaction with us?

God’s perspective on time

Kairos—and its derivatives—is used some 86 times in the Bible. Interestingly, the word *kairos* actually comes from the Greek root word *kara*, meaning “head.” When we talk about things “coming to a head,” we mean things are coming to a time of decisive action.

In addressing the urgency of responding to the gospel, Paul exhorts: “For he (God) says, ‘In the time (*kairos*) of my favor I heard you, and in the day of salvation I helped you.’ I tell you, now is the time (*kairos*) of God’s favor, now is the day of salvation” (2 Corinthians 6:2).

Paul reminds us: “Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time (*kairos*) we will reap a harvest if we do not give up. Therefore, as we

have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers” (Galatians 6:9-10).

In his first spoken words in the Gospel of Mark, Jesus says: “The time (*kairos*) has come. The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news” (Mark 1:15).

And, in what is perhaps one of the most oft-quoted passages regarding time, Paul encourages us to “walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise, redeeming the time (*kairos*), because the days are evil” (Ephesians 5:15-16).

“Redeeming” in the Greek literally means “to purchase something from.” It’s a marketplace term. Paul is saying when we use our time wisely, we are purchasing something, we are making an investment in something useful and important. We are “buying our time back” from the evil days in which we live.

Redeeming the time, making the most of every opportunity, making the best use of the time, even when stuck in a waiting time, that’s living in *kairos*.

Prioritizing time

Of *chronos* and *kairos*, which should be commanding priority in our lives?

Living in *chronos* is important; in fact, it’s inescapable. Psalm 90:12 reminds us wisdom comes from carefully counting our days in a *chronos* kind of way: “Teach us to number our days, that we may gain a heart of wisdom.” Numbering our days requires a *chronos* kind of accounting from us.

There is nothing wrong with *chronos*. God created it. We have to live in it. And we are called upon to take responsibility for the *chronos* God gives us

each day.

What we constantly have to guard against, however, is not allowing the *chronos* moments of each day to overtake the *kairos* moments, those “times” in which God is at work and attempting to speak to us each day.

We cannot become so consumed with the scheduled stuff that we miss out on the significant stuff God may be doing in and around and through us.

Living in the right time

In *The Empire Strikes Back*, Yoda says of young Luke Skywalker: “All his life he has looked away ... to the future, to the horizon. Never his mind on where he was.”

Kairos time says to us: “Focus your mind on where you are right now. Set your mind on what God is trying to say to you right now. Tune your mind to the *kairos* moments all around you even now.”

Kairos has been described as follows: “A ‘*kairos* moment’ is the appointed time when the Holy Spirit is moving and ready to act. It is a ‘pregnant moment’ (when) the Holy Spirit is prepared to deliver the power of God to bring a dynamic transformation to a person or situation. Often, when a *kairos* moment is occurring or is about to occur, people who are tuned-in spiritually sense a ‘shift’ occurring. They sense something is about to happen. The Spirit is brooding. He is hovering near. He is waiting for the word of command that will release him to act.”

As we continue navigating our way through this seemingly endless waiting time of pandemic, what are we going to do? Are we going to sit back and passively endure it, wait it out and count the days until this nightmare finally ends? That’s living in *chronos*. That’s wasting our time.

Or, are we going to stay tuned-in spiritually, with a sense of expectancy and

anticipation, to see how the Spirit of God will act? That's living in *kairos*.

Which time will you choose to live in today?

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