

It's About Time
Ecclesiastes 3:1 – 8, 11; 1 Peter 3:1 – 15
Sunday, July 21, 2019

The other week I read an article about a town in Norway that wants to *ban time*. They want to *do away* with the concept of time. It's an island way up in northern Norway, north of the Arctic Circle, where for over two months every summer (from May 18 to July 26), the sun never sets. It is daytime, 24 hours a day, for over two months. And in the winter, there are over two months when the sun never *rises*. It is *nighttime* 24 hours a day. And what the residents there say is that time is *irrelevant*. People go out for bike rides at 10:30 at night. Kids are out playing soccer or going swimming at 2 in the morning. People are out mowing their lawns at 4 AM. There's a bridge that leads to this island, and all along the rails of the bridge, people have taken off their wristwatches and fixed them to the rails, as a way of showing that when they go to this island, they are abandoning their concept of time.

Now, I don't know about you, but I had a lot of *questions* about that. How do you know when to go to school or work? How do you know when the grocery store is open? If you call and schedule a doctor's appointment, how do you know when to go? How would we know when *worship* begins? Well, the residents of this town say, "We do *what* we want, *when* we want to do it. We eat when we're hungry, and we go to bed when we're tired. Children still have to go to school, but there is room for flexibility." No one uses fixed times when making plans. They just say, "See you later."

And the residents say that this move away from time has greatly improved their quality of life. One resident said, "All over the world, people are characterized by stress and depression. In many cases this can be linked to the feeling of being trapped, of not having enough time. Well, here we have all the time we want!" This is hard for a lot of us to imagine, because we are so

bound to time that it's hard to imagine a world *without* it. But according to the residents of this island, there is a great freedom and peace that comes with letting go of time.

For the past three weeks, we've been working through a series on the Fruit of the Spirit from Paul's letter to the Galatians, where Paul says that if you live your life according to the Spirit of God, desiring the things of the *Spirit* rather than the things of the *flesh*, then your life will be characterized by love and joy and peace. This week Paul adds to that *patience*, and patience is all about *time*. It's about letting go of our *ordering* of time, our *insistency* upon time, and trusting God to provide *what we need* precisely *when we need it*.

The Bible has two different ways of speaking about time. There is *chronos* time. *Chronos* is a Greek word for time, and it's where we get the word *chronological*, which means that things are arranged in order by the time that they happen. So *ordered* time. *Chronos* time deals with set numbers, dates, and order. It's the way that *we* are used to thinking about time; 11 o'clock, 12 o'clock, 1 o'clock. What time does worship start? 9:30. What time is it *over*? 10:30. That is *chronos* time. You know when something *begins* or when it *ends*. It is *set* and *certain*.

But there is *another* Greek word for time in scripture: *kairos*. *Kairos* *doesn't* deal with set minutes, hours, dates, and times. It's more about "the opportune moment," when the time *feels* right. When is dinnertime? You might eat dinner at 5:30, some people 6:00, some people 6:30 or even 7:00. Whenever you're *hungry*. When is bedtime? For some people it's 9:00, for others it's 10:30, and for some it's midnight or 1 AM. And that might differ from night to night. It's whenever you're *tired*.

How long is a football game? Four 15-minute quarters. That's two 30-minute halves. That's 60 minutes. That's *chronos* time; it is *set* and *certain*. How long is a *baseball* game? Nine *innings*, with no set time limit. You just play until it's *over*. That's *kairos* time.

Human beings tend to live mostly in *chronos* time. And it can be said that *God* lives mostly in *kairos* time.

We see this when we look at today's scripture reading from Peter's second letter. The Christians Peter was writing to 2,000 years ago were *absolutely convinced* that Christ was going to return *in their lifetime*. Well, it wasn't *happening*, and the people around them start laughing at them, scoffing and mocking them, saying, "Where's your savior? I thought he was going to return? You keep saying, 'He's coming! He's coming!' but where is he? Did he forget? Did he break his promise?"

Peter says to that, "God does not adhere to our understanding of time. What seems like an eternity to us may only be a *day* to God. It's not that God is slow," he says, "it's that God is *patient*. God is working toward something here, and if it's not happening fast enough for us, well, I'm sorry. But God doesn't adhere to *our* timeframe. God doesn't work on *our* schedules. Everything is going to happen right when God needs it to happen; at the opportune time. In the meantime," Peter says, "until it *does* happen, be at peace and grow in grace and live in ways that are righteous, so that when it *does* happen, you will be ready."

He's saying, "You're thinking about all of this in *chronos* time; from *your* perspective. But God is working in *kairos* time, so you have to open yourself up and look at it from *God's*

perspective.” When we can *do* that – look at time and life and other people from God’s perspective – we are practicing patience.

When you’re stuck in traffic behind someone who’s going *way too slow*. You’re in a hurry, you need to get somewhere, and this person is holding you back. It’s easy to get frustrated, angry, and impatient. But what if that person just lost his job, or she’s driving home from the hospital where she’s in the process of losing her husband of 60 years, and they’ve got a few things weighing on them?

Or you’re in a restaurant and the service is just *horrible*. The waitress has messed up your order; she’s not refilling your drinks. You’ve been waiting forever. It’s easy to get impatient and complain to the manager. But what if that waitress just found out that her mother has cancer, and she’s a little distracted right now?

And what if the fact that you got slowed down in traffic or had to wait a little longer in a restaurant means that you don’t get into that car accident that you would have gotten into if you had been on time? What if the patience of the Lord was your salvation? And what if *your* patience is what saves *that person*; if it’s just what *they* need to get through this moment?

Patience is about letting go of *our insistency* upon time – *when* things happen, how *fast* they should happen – and opening ourselves up to a bigger picture and understanding of *God’s* time.

And here’s the thing about patience. We don’t just pray for patience and say, “God, I want to become a more patient person,” and *boom*, God makes us patient. That’s not how it works. God doesn’t just give us patience. God gives us *opportunities to become* patient; to *learn* how to be

patient. Opportunities to practice slowing down and looking at this bigger picture. Opportunities to see things from someone else's perspective and to see things from *God's* perspective. So maybe you've been *waiting* for something, and it's just not happening, it's taking too long, and you're getting impatient and frustrated. But maybe God is doing something that you can't see yet, and this is an opportunity to *become* patient. What would it look like for you to take that opportunity and *learn* from it?

Ecclesiastes says that for everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven. That there are appropriate times in our lives for certain things to happen – to be born, to die, to plant, to harvest, to laugh, to cry, to mourn, and to dance. There is a *rhythm* in our lives. God has created an ordered system. There is a time for everything that needs to be done. Now, that may mean that *now* is not the time to do *this* thing. Sometimes we have things in our lives that we *want* to happen, but God may be saying, “Now is not the time for that. This is not the season in your life for that. I need you to do something else right now. That is going to have to wait.”

It says that God has put a sense of past and future into our minds; God has given us an understanding and awareness of time, but even with that, we can't understand what God has done from the beginning to the end. We can't see the big picture. So while we may want something to happen right now, we can't see how that thing happening will affect everything else in our lives, how it will affect *other* people's lives, how it will affect God's larger purpose for the world. God has created a time for everything, but the challenge for us is being able to *see* that because *God's* timing is not always *our* timing.

We practice patience – with ourselves and with others – by letting go of our insistency on *when* things should happen and *how fast* they should happen, opening ourselves up to this bigger

picture, and trusting that God is leading us through this, so that what *needs* to happen *will* happen *when* it should happen. There will always be *anxiety* that comes with that. Patience means that we trust in God's timing for our lives, to the point that we can be *okay* with the anxiety of waiting, because we know that God is *good* and will get us exactly where we need to be.