

In God's Time
2 Peter 3:1–15
Sunday, June 13, 2021

Lately we have been helping our kids understand the concept of *time zones*. It came up in conversation around dinner one night, and it was *impossible* to them that it was still only the middle of the afternoon out in California, but it was already *tomorrow morning* in Korea. So we talked about how people came up with the concept of time zones because if it was the same time everywhere, all over the world, then in some places the sun would be out at 3 in the morning, while in other places it would be pitch black at Noon. And that conversation with *them* made me think about some things that could be really helpful for *us*, so we are going to spend the next couple of weeks talking about *time* and *timing*. And I want to start by asking you some questions.

First, what time is it? That was probably a pretty easy question; you just checked your watch or your clock. But...John, what time is it right now? It's 2:30 PM for us as we are recording this.

What *day* is it? Again, an easy question. It's Sunday, right? But for us, right now, it's *Thursday*.

What *year* is it? There shouldn't be any debate about this one, right? It's 2021. But if we talked to someone who is Jewish, they might give us a different answer, because in the Jewish calendar it is the year 5781.

What if you're an astronaut floating around on a space shuttle out in space? What time is it in space? Well, that's a much harder question to answer because we base our system of time on a

planet rotating and revolving around the sun. So if you aren't *on* a planet, there's nothing to base time on. You could almost say that there *is* no time.

If I ask you how long a *day* is, you'll tell me 24 hours, right? But what if you're standing on the surface of Mars, where a day is not 24 hours; it's 24 hours and about 40 minutes? So what *time* and *day* is it on *Mars* right now? And a *year* on Mars isn't 365 days; it's 669 days. So what *year* is it on Mars right now?

If I asked you to call me at sunset today, you would call around 8:30 P.M. That's when the sun sets here. But ask someone in Bergland, Michigan, in the *same time zone* as us, and they would call you almost an hour and a half later, at 9:53 P.M., because that's when the sun is scheduled to set *there* today.

Our understanding of time is *relative*. It depends on *where we are*. One person's understanding of time can be *very different* than someone else's.

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* time *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, years are passing, and it wasn't *happening*, and the people around them start laughing at them, scoffing at them 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.”

We live in a culture that has gotten very used to having *whatever* we want, *whenever* we want it. We have 24-hour news stations; movies and TV, books and music on demand. You could pull out your phone right now, download a movie or a book and start watching it or reading it immediately. We’ve gotten so used to this instant society, having everything at the push of a button, that when we *do* have to wait for things in life, it can be really *hard*. It doesn’t happen *fast enough* for us. It’s like we have lost some of our capacity to wait.

But sometimes *waiting* can be *good* for us. Waiting can be an opportunity to *grow*.

This past week, I celebrated my 8th anniversary as the pastor here. And it made me think about the process that brought us together. I was the pastor of a church in Nebraska, and back in 2010 I started to feel like God was calling me to go somewhere else. So I started looking around and talking to churches. But nothing was working out. I would talk to church after church, and either they weren’t interested in *me*, or I wasn’t interested in *them*. For two years it went on like this. And I started to get impatient like, “What’s going on here? Why is this taking so long?”

In 2012, I started talking to this church in Indianapolis, and it got to the point where I went out there to visit and preach, and they offered me the position. After two years of waiting, it had

finally happened. And I said no. Because the more we talked about it and prayed about it, Jen and I discerned that that wasn't where God was calling us to be. So after two years of searching, I said, "You know what? I think we could stay where we are for a long time and be really happy." So I stopped looking and decided to be fully committed there. And of course it was right after *that* that I had my first contact with St. John's.

When Victor, the previous pastor here, retired in 2012, the original plan was for the next pastor to begin right away. But it didn't work out that way. The process of calling a new pastor took longer than expected. And there were undoubtedly times when you were saying, "Why is this taking so long?" But because the wait was longer than expected, you ended up with an interim pastor, Nicole, who was really *good* for the church. And in that wait, the people on the Pastor Nominating Committee grew closer together. I would bet that as a *church* you grew closer together, and learned new things about *yourself* as a church. And as it turned out, I needed to go through some experiences and learn some things (about *myself*, about being a pastor) in that time that *prepared* me to come be the pastor *here*.

The wait was longer than any of us expected, but it ended up being *good* for us; *waiting* helped us *grow*. It *prepared* us for the new thing that God was doing.

There's a line in the movie *The Lord of the Rings* where Galdalf the wizard arrives somewhere later than people were expecting him to. Someone says, "You're late!" to which Galdalf replies, "A wizard is never late. Nor is he early. He arrives precisely when he means to." And I think we can look at God and our lives in a similar way. It's so easy to get impatient and say, "God, why is this taking so long? This thing that I'm *waiting* for, that I'm *hoping* for, why isn't it *happening*?" But God is never late. Nor is God early. God arrives precisely when God means

to. God's will for our lives comes about precisely when God means for it to. We just have to open ourselves up to looking at things in God's time.

There's a saying that when ask God to help us be more patient, God doesn't just all of a sudden make us more patient. Instead, God gives us *opportunities* to learn patience. 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. To take a step grow in our capacity to demonstrate patience, which *is* a fruit of the Spirit, something that as followers of Christ, our lives should be bearing.

Now, it's one thing to be able to look *back* at our lives in hindsight and see that; see, "Oh, *that's* why this took so long. Because *this* thing needed to happen first, or because I was *actually* supposed to experience *this* thing, and it wasn't *time* for that yet. *That's* why I had to wait." It's fairly easy to see that after the fact. The challenge is to open ourselves up to it *as it is happening*. To be able to say, "I'm being forced to wait right now, and I'm a little impatient. But what is God trying to *show* me? How can I be patient and *grow* in this situation?"

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 a bigger understanding of *God's* time. 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.