

I have a quick question, have any of you all heard the difference between chronos and kairos time?

You might be familiar with the word chronos, but what about kairos?

The ancient Greeks had two words for time: chronos and kairos.

Chronos time is what our watches say.

It's the sequential passing of time, marked by minutes, hours, days, months, years, etc.

It is time that is chronological, notice the root of that word, chrono.

Kairos time is different.

Kairos refers to a period or season in which something significant happens.

While chronos is quantitative, kairos is qualitative, the length of time is less significant than what happens during that period of time.

In Christian theology, we believe that kairos time is the time during which God is doing something significant.

If it feels as if the ground is shifting beneath our feet and things are not as they were before, that's kairos time.

Rev. Paul Tillich was a famous Lutheran theologian and he used the idea of kairos time a lot in his writings.

He believed that those moments are crises in human history, which create an opportunity for the human subject to make an existential decision about their reality.

Kairos time is not just the proper time, but the opportune time for action for the greater good.

This time interrupts chronos time.

Chronos time is what we plan with our calendars when we make schedules to balance work, family and other responsibilities.

Kairos time lands in our lives, often unexpectedly and throws our calendars out the window.

It says, nope, there is something greater that needs your attention, and it won't be found on your to-do lists.

For the earliest Christians, kairos time was when God was going to return.

For them, kairos time was judgment day, which is why the earliest Christians lived with such a sense of urgency.

They needed to repent and prepare because Jesus was coming back any moment.

For us, kairos time is still just as urgent, but has changed a bit.

It is experienced when we feel the irrepressible call to do God's work in the world, by responding to something that has occurred.

Guess what?

This moment in time that we are living in right now, this period in American history, this is kairos time.

And guess what else?

The time when Rev. Dr. King lived, during the Civil Rights movement, that was kairos time.

This isn't to say that all these moments, which seem suspended and set apart from chronos time are the same, they aren't.

The only thing that they necessarily have in common is that they have a greater influence on history than their chronological time would suggest.

Dr. King knew that he was living in kairos time, he knew the responsibility that he and other civil rights leaders had, in that moment, to stand up for workers, people of color and all those who were powerless.

While he was in Memphis, he was meeting with people who supported the planned strike of sanitation workers, and in his conversation with them, he reflected upon the nature of time in conversation with the threats upon his life.

On April 3, 1968, while meeting with his supporters, he said,

*“And then I got into Memphis, and some began to say the threats — or talk about the threats — that were out,*

*what would happen to me from some of our white sick brothers.*

*Well, I don't know what will happen now.*

*We've got some difficult days ahead.*

*But it doesn't matter with me now, because I have been to the mountaintop.*

*And I don't mind.*

*Like anybody I would like to live — a long life — longevity has its place.*

*But I'm not concerned about that now;*

*I just want to do God's will... So I'm happy tonight!*

*I'm not worried about anything!*

*I'm not fearing any man!*

*Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord!"*

At 6:01 PM the next day, escaped convict James Earl Ray assassinated King on the balcony of the Lorraine Motel.

He was 39.

Riots in more than 60 cities ensued.

On April 8, more than 300,000 people attended his funeral.

Part of what made Dr. King so courageous even though he had been stabbed, even though he knew there were death threats and bomb scares, was that he realized chronos time, the mere passage of days and weeks and years, no matter how trivial or important, is no match for kairos time.

Kairos is the unique and opportune moment in which God is doing something profound in the world, and we are called to participate in its co-creation.

Dr. King knew that what he was doing, in the end, wasn't about him.

It was about that which he was pointing us towards, the 'beloved community,' as he called it.

The King Center for Nonviolent Social Change states that,

*"Dr. King's Beloved Community is a global vision, in which all people can share in the wealth of the earth.*

*In the Beloved Community, poverty, hunger and homelessness will not be tolerated because international standards of human decency will not allow it.*

*Racism and all forms of discrimination, bigotry and prejudice will be replaced by an all-inclusive spirit of sisterhood and brotherhood.*

*In the Beloved Community, international disputes will be resolved by peaceful conflict-resolution and reconciliation of adversaries, instead of military power.*

*Love and trust will triumph over fear and hatred.*

*Peace with justice will prevail over war and military conflict"*

This is the world he believed that we could create together if a critical mass of people were educated and trained and committed to the philosophy and methods of nonviolence.

He believed with his whole being that our planet could get to this place, and his job, was to point us in the right direction, to lead us for a specific period of time, towards that goal.

In today's scripture, John the Baptist does something very similar.

John knew his preaching, his prophesying, none of it, in the end, was about him.

He too was pointing to something greater than himself, to one who he knew would change the world.

He tells others what he has seen, just as King said he saw the Mountaintop.

John gives evidence on behalf of Jesus, always pointing towards him.

As he baptizes with water, he knows his work is not for its own sake, but for the sake of the testimony about the light that comes into the world.

John also lived in kairos time, not chronos time.

He knew Jesus' time was different, set apart.

He might not have known that it would lead to a worldwide movement, still going strong 2,000 year later, but he knew that Jesus and his ministry were worth committing his life to.

And he did.

Just like Rev. Dr., King, John the Baptist also had an untimely death and was beheaded as ordered by King Herod.

But he wasn't concerned about days or weeks or the risks to his life, he wanted to make sure that everyone, including his own disciples and the religious authorities, knew of Jesus and that they should follow him.

He tried to deflect attention away from himself, pointing to Jesus and saying things like,

*"Here is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world ...*

*After me comes a man who ranks ahead of me because he was before me...*

*I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and it remained on him.*

*I myself have seen and have testified that this is the Son of God."*

Like I said before, we are also living in kairos time.

This era that we are living in now is unprecedented and we will probably see changes in our country that we can't even anticipate.

The storm of discord is brewing, and we are in the thick of it.

Now is not the time to be scared or be in denial, but to see that we have a great responsibility at this moment in kairos time.

Now is the time to realize that we have been given a rare opportunity.

We are always called to stand up for our values of love, justice, inclusivity and protecting the vulnerable, but now we are living in a time when those basic values are being actively threatened.

Our voices, our actions, our prayers and our open doors are needed now more than they have been, in recent history.

Now is the time to be bold and to be courageous, not afraid.

But the good news is that we've got this.

We are in this together, we can do this.

Or, as one of my favorite authors, Glennon Doyle Melton says, *"we can do hard things."*

Because, at the end of the day, it's not about each of us as individuals.

It's about what we did during this sacred kairos time, and our job, in this moment,

is to bring our nation that much closer to being the beloved community that Dr. King imagined. Amen.