

Mark 1:14-20 (NRSV)

Now after John was arrested, Jesus came to Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God, and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news."

As Jesus passed along the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and his brother Andrew casting a net into the sea--for they were fishermen. And Jesus said to them, "Follow me and I will make you fish for people." And immediately they left their nets and followed him. As he went a little farther, he saw James son of Zebedee and his brother John, who were in their boat mending the nets. Immediately he called them; and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired men, and followed him.

Grace to you and peace, from God our Father and from our Lord Jesus Christ.

One of the insights we get from a branch of physics called quantum mechanics is that time is not continuous. We like to think that time just slides along from one moment to the next, but that turns out not to be true. In fact, time, like energy, comes in units called quanta, and the movement from one moment to the next is governed entirely by probability. So, there is a finite probability, for example, that the baptismal font might in a moment disappear from where it is now and reappear in the upper right corner of the nave over here. It's not a very high probability, but it's possible. It's this kind of knowledge that keeps people on edge a little bit. Now that you know it, you'll probably be a little more on edge, too. That's probably not why you come to church on Sunday.

Actually, all this has been known since the middle 1930's when quantum mechanics was developed. It's interesting to me that this hasn't affected popular culture very much at all. The ancient Greeks knew something like this. They had two different words for "time."

One word corresponds to our idea of clock time – that word is “chronos.” When you ask, “What time is it?” the answer you expect to get is an answer in terms of clock time – “it’s 9:30” or something like that. The passage of time, having time to kill, everything takes time, these are all “chronos” time.

But there is a second Greek word for time, and that word is “kairos.” Spelled K-A-I-R-O-S. Kairos refers more to the importance of a moment, to its significance. Kairotic time is God’s time, a time for a choice, for decisive action. A sort of turning point.

In today’s Gospel lesson, after the arrest of John the Baptist, Jesus begins his public ministry with the proclamation, “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news.” The time word that the Gospel uses is “Kairos.”

Jesus isn’t saying, “It’s 9:30,” or “It’s January 25.” He’s not saying that he’s got an appointment in his Daytimer. He’s saying that the time has come. The time to repent, to change direction, the time to decide, to believe in the Good News and act on that belief, that time has come. The world has changed and it is time for you to change, too.

The very next thing that happens is that Jesus calls the disciples. Now, the first thing, I think, that everyone notices in this reading is that the disciples come right away, “immediately” as Mark tells us. These disciples who will do everything wrong in the coming months do this thing right. They come immediately. And we wonder would we have come immediately?

Think about this – we don’t know how many people Jesus called to that day. Was there another bunch of people who were called who didn’t come? Who were too busy? Who had other plans? We don’t know. If there was another group, we don’t know their

names, because they didn't come. Simon and Andrew, James and John, we know their names because they followed.

Maybe it was their "Kairos" time, their time of decision, their time to choose. In the reading from Paul's letter to the Corinthians, he tells the church at Corinth that the appointed time has grown short. Guess what word he uses – yep, "kairos" time. Even Jonah, he goes to the Ninevites, those notorious evildoers and enemies of Israel. Jonah marches into their city and shouts, "Forty days more and Nineveh will be overthrown." And what do you know, they believe him, they repent, they fast, they wear sackcloth and ashes, in fact even their farm animals fast and wear sackcloth and ashes, they repent and God spares them. It was their time, their decision time to repent and believe and they did.

How do we know whether a moment is just clock time or whether it's "Kairos" time? Well, frequently you don't, not until afterwards, and you can look back and say, "That was the moment. Everything changed after that." An idea, a chance encounter when all of a sudden you realize that you're looking at the person you want to marry. You make a lucky guess, you say the right thing, or you make a bad decision or a mistake. A car accident, a misstep. And then everything is different.

But sometimes you do know that it's Kairos time. When there is such a push away from something that you can't ignore it anymore, when there is so much pain or anger that you can't keep living the way you have been. Maybe a relationship that has gone bad, or something about yourself or someone else that you just can't tolerate any more. Or when there is such a pull towards something, some opportunity, that you can't resist it any more. The new job, going off to college, deciding to have a child.

For me when I was called to Saint Nicholas, I knew everything in my life was going to change. And it did. Think back a second in

your own life – can you identify moments of God’s time, times where everything changed in one moment, one decision, one thing?

(Good long pause here.)

How can you be prepared for God’s time, for “Kairos” time? One way is to be conscious of yourself. It’s amazing to me how good we are at ignoring what our hearts or our bodies are telling us, ignoring our hunger or our pain or our distress or our hope. Being aware of yourself is one way of being aware of God at work in and through you. Another way to be ready for God’s time is to be open to God’s word and God’s voice, to be aware that potentially any time can be God’s time. If you’re always ready, you’ll be ready then, too. Lots of New Testament readings are about being ready for God – the parable of the wise and foolish bridesmaids, the parable of the rich fool. We can be open to God through prayer, the kind of prayer where you ask, “God, how are you at work in this moment?”

Kairos time, God’s time can be a wonderful time, a time of great creativity and excitement, a time of spontaneity and life. But it can also be a dark time, a fearful time. There’s a passage in Romans, Chapter 8 that reads, “We know that all things work together for good for those who love God” but a more accurate reading is that “God works for good in all things for those who love God.” Do you see the difference? In times that are frightening, that seem dark and dangerous, we know that God is at work for good. We don’t always know how, but we know, we trust, we believe that God is at work for good.

In a little while we’ll be receiving seven families into membership here, and I hope this will be a Kairos moment for them, a moment where God is at work to change their lives for the better. And a little while after that, we’ll be having a congregational meeting where we’ll need to make some decisions. And I pray that that will

be a Kairos moment for this congregation, a moment where God is at work to change lives for the better.

And that is the miracle, that God is always at work for good. Yes, the baptismal font might disappear from where it is now and reappear in the upper corner of the nave. But that wouldn't be a miracle, that would just be something that happened that seemed unlikely to happen. No, the miracle is that we have a God who seizes the moment, any moment, and makes something good happen. What time is it? It's God's time. All the time.

Amen.