

# **Kairos Time in a Chronos Moment**

*on the occasion of the  
Ordination of Cheri Herrboldt to Christian Ministry  
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Luke 3, especially Luke 3:15-23

The setting the writer of Luke creates is dramatic: John, the fiery preacher, has been sermonizing all around the area of the Jordan River. Crowds are following him. He gives warnings, "You brood of vipers!" He promises amazing miracles, God can raise up followers from the very stones of the river. He calls for repentance, for life changes. People are clamoring to know what they can do to repent. "Share your clothing with those who have none, share your food with the hungry." John has prepared the way just as it said in Isaiah 40: *"The voice of one crying in the wilderness, 'Prepare the way of the Lord... and all flesh shall see the salvation of God.'"*

This must have been *kairos* time, listening to John preach, experiencing the power of God, the urge to change. *Kairos* is a Greek word for time, the kind of time when we are unaware of the clock or the *chronos* time. In *kairos* time we are present to the moment, to the people, to the situation. In *chronos* time, chronological time, we are aware of the minutes and hours passing, of getting things done, of being part of history.

The story of John the Baptist is clearly situated in *chronos* time. At the beginning of chapter 3 the writer gives us a very particular setting of the emperor, governor, local rulers, and even who the religious leader was, the current high priest. Luke must have been prepared for the doubters who wanted to say that this John and Jesus never really happened. The writer is telling us, "This happened in a real time and place. This is not some thing that we made up. You want to know when it happened? Well here is the historical situation."

What happens next however is *kairos* time. Luke describes the significant moments of John's preaching, the statements that moved people. John's preaching is situated not in the reign of Tiberius but in the words of Isaiah. Luke cites phrases that moved people. John says:

<sup>8</sup>Bear fruits worthy of repentance. Do not begin to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our ancestor'; for I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children to Abraham. <sup>9</sup>Even now the ax is lying at the root of the trees; every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire."

And then we hear the response from the people.

<sup>12</sup>Even tax collectors came to be baptized, and they asked him, "Teacher, what should we do?" <sup>13</sup>He said to them, "Collect no more than the amount prescribed for you." <sup>14</sup>Soldiers also asked him, "And we, what should we do?" He said to them, "Do not extort money from anyone by threats or false accusation, and be satisfied with your wages."

This is *kairos* time. Lives are being changed. Hearts are being broken open to new levels of compassion. John tells them, "Just wait, this is nothing. I can only baptize with water but there is one who comes after me with an even more powerful baptism. The baptism of the Holy Spirit and fire."

Maybe you have experienced the time: the preacher gets all fired up. People are really engaged, ready to make new commitments. Emotions and temperatures run high. But this is not a tent revival meeting like some of us remember. This preaching on the shore of the stony Jordan River is not about a temporary commitment brought on by emotion. This is about real life changes - in the way you do business. This is about the way you interact with others, even

those over whom you have power. John is preparing the way for the one who comes bearing the winnowing fork. And you better be ready.

And then Luke hits us with another *chronos* moment bringing us back to reality. It is not just joy around the Jordan. Herod does not like what John has been saying. Herod is offended by the personal and public preaching John has been doing. John has been critical of Herod's rule and that cannot stand. John is going to prison.

Then we are in *kairos* time again. The writer takes us back to the Jordan River, the site of fiery preaching and conversion experiences. All the people have been baptized and Jesus too has entered the water and been baptized.

(time for silence, to create *kairos*)

It is as if Jesus has his own private *kairos* time. He is in prayer, not aware of the *chronos* moment, not aware of all the people around him, just present to the moment and to God. He senses the heavens opening, he senses the Holy Spirit resting on him like a dove. So powerful is the experience that he hears a voice, "Beloved Child of God. I am well pleased with you."

Can you imagine? To hear the voice of God calling you "beloved?" To hear a voice say that God is pleased with you?

This is a mystical experience that many of us in this noisy, busy, *chronos*-addled era do not have. Being unaware of time and out of our minds. We call it "not paying attention." But this is *kairos* time, letting go of the clock, letting go of the need to be in control. In *kairos* time we embrace our connection with the creator, with the earth and her creatures, with the largeness of Love.

We don't know how long this time lasted for Jesus. It is described rather matter of factly. Then Luke yanks us back into *chronos* time once more with the reality check:

Jesus was about 30 years old as he began his work. He was the son of Joseph, (as was thought) son of Heli, son of Matthat, son of Levi, etc, etc. (all the way back to) son of Adam, son of God.

Jesus heard the voice of God call to him, affirm him for who he was as a child of God. So too we affirm today the call from God to Cheri. I don't know if Cheri has heard the voice of God out loud, whether she has seen doves close by. But I know that I have seen her ministry and that the God of Love and Compassion, the God of Peace and Persistence is at work through her.

In practical terms, ministry is work that can be terribly *chronos* obsessed. There are only so many hours in the day. And of course chaplains work at night, and in the middle of the night. Cheri is well acquainted with chronological time as a chaplain at hospitals the past 3 years. But in the midst of these long *chronos* moments, *kairos* breaks in.

One of the gifts of ministry is being with people in those *kairos* times, when the world seems to stop and the only awareness we have is of the exquisite fragility of life. Sometimes it is unutterably painful, sometimes it is inexpressibly joyful. But always it is good to have a companion in a minister like Cheri in that time.

What Jesus shows us in this story of his baptism and his subsequent trials in the desert is that ministers need to find *kairos* time too. It is not enough that we are present for others, we must take *chronos* moments to find *kairos* time for ourselves. Sometimes we are forced into it as Jesus was after his baptism when

he was led into the wilderness for the time of temptation. Other times we seek the time ourselves.

To seek out *kairos* is to listen for a different voice. There are many ways to seek this time with God. We might call it prayer or meditation. Byron jogs. Janet plays piano. Eve paints or Karen knits. Sometimes *kairos* happens when we are not expecting it.

It also happens when we do expect it, when we take time to sit, to seek the thin veil between earth and heaven, between ourselves and God. *Kairos* is when we quiet ourselves and slow down enough to hear the voice of God - telling us that we are loved.

Those times when we experience "God's time" as Henri Nouwen calls it, are not easily explained to others. Words often fail to convey the importance of that *kairos* time in the *chronos* moment. The gospel writers try with words to tell us about this important experience that Jesus had at his baptism. We often just gloss over it as one more story in the gospels. But the fact that this peculiar event, a dove and a voice from heaven, at Jesus' baptism is mentioned in all four gospels, should get our attention. Jesus' experience at his baptism was life changing for him and subsequently for his followers, and even for us.

Cheri, as one who is charged with bringing good news, you are also called to *kairos* time. It seems too much to say you are called to live in the present moment all the time. Who of us can? Perhaps that is another one of those signs that point us to the divinity of Jesus, the fact that he seemed to have lived his life so fully in God's time. Cheri, you are called to *kairos* time. You are called by God. You are beloved and God is well pleased with you.

And we, who are part of this priesthood of all believers; we too are called to live in *kairos* time. For it is in God's time that we hear the voice that calls us all beloved children of God.