

Church of the Crossroads  
Second Sunday after Epiphany  
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“WHAT TIME IS IT?”

John 2:1-11

By now, you have probably put up your new calendars and are back to work after the holiday break, back to the routines of daily living. After the holidays, the “holy” days, we find ourselves once again caught up in *chronos*, or time that is marked by days, weeks, and years, time that is measured by getting up in the morning, preparing the children for school, eating breakfast, going to the office, getting everyone to their scheduled activities, preparing dinner, eating, and sleeping. As the narrator describes it in W. H. Auden’s dramatic poem *For the Time Being*:

. . . for the time being, here we all are,  
Back in the moderate Aristotelian city  
Of darning and the Eight-Fifteen, where Euclid’s geometry  
And Newton’s mechanics would account for our experience,  
And the kitchen table exists because I scrub it.

And so it is that we find ourselves once again in *chronos*, chronological time. Now, there is something comforting about the ordinary time we call *chronos*. It is comforting to know that the sun will rise and also set, something comforting about the daily routines that mark the passage of time, something good about life’s regularity. Thank God that every day is not Christmas Day or New Year’s Eve, or the Day of Epiphany. We simply could not stand it. There is something good about dismantling the Christmas tree and getting back to the daily-ness of life.

On the other hand, *chronos*, that time marked by the clock, can be also a burden. One wonders whether life will always be this way, filled with the problems that seek to undo us, filled with wars and rumors of war, replete with unfulfilled dreams and tasks unfinished, and defined by the kind of sameness that can defeat the human spirit. Chronological time can be comforting but also a burden. The burden of *chronos* comes from the feeling that what is has always been and always shall be. What we hope for will never come.

Yet, *chronos* is not the only time we have. We have also been given by God the gift of *kairos*, or revelatory time. *Kairos* is that moment filled with meaning, that moment when something new is given, when a kind of life-giving change is announced. Such moments are marked by an incredible clarity, an “aha” that redeems chronological time and gives it meaning.

Such a revelatory moment is described in the Gospel reading for today, the story from John’s Gospel that tells of the time when Jesus turned water into wine at the wedding in Cana. On the surface, the story begins in an ordinary way. Jesus, his mother, and his disciples have been invited to a wedding. We are told, however, that the wedding occurred “on the third day.” Immediately, we think of the resurrection, which will also occur “on the third day.” The wedding guests, apparently, have had more than their share to drink, and the wine gives out. The mother then says to her son, “They have no wine.” She thinks that Jesus should do something about it, but he says, “Woman, what concern is that to you and to me? *“My hour has not yet come.”* The *kairos* moment has not yet arrived. Mary, however, will have nothing to do with this kind of avoidance. She draws the servants into the conversation, and tells them to do whatever Jesus says.

This is interesting. The mother of Jesus pulls her son into a revelatory moment. Immediately, we are drawn into a story that is becoming extraordinary. We are told that there are six immense water jars for the Jewish rites of purification, each jar holding twenty or thirty gallons. So we have anywhere from 120 to 180 gallons of purification water. This water was used in much the same manner as holy water in the Roman Catholic Church. One dipped a finger in the water and touched the forehead. 180 gallons would be enough water to purify thousands!

The water becomes wine, not just any old wine, but the kind of new wine that is used at the beginning of a feast rather than at the end. This was the first of Jesus’ signs that revealed his glory, that is, the presence of God in him.

A *kairos* moment, a revelatory moment, an extraordinary moment this is, indeed, a sign that Jesus has come to bring newness of life, an abundance of life, symbolized by the turning of a large amount of water into wine.

*Kairos* moments – they are present throughout John’s Gospel and the synoptic gospels as well. They are also present in life as we ourselves know it. Think of that moment Rosa Parks refused to give up her seat on a bus in the city of Montgomery in the year 1955. Her silent defiance spoke for a whole people. Her subsequent arrest sparked a 381-day bus boycott, which ignited the civil rights movement and changed America. This weekend, we think of Martin Luther King Jr.’s “I have a dream” speech, but that speech might never have been delivered had it not been for the moment Rosa Parks refused to give up her seat on a bus.

You can surely think of other *kairos* moments, events that have changed life for the better. They have even occurred in our own lives. We have all had those extraordinary moments of insight and clarity, those moments when the question, those moments when we were keenly aware that something new was taking place, those moments when we made the kinds of decisions that changed the shape of our lives, even the shape of the world.

Do you suppose such moments will occur in our lives and in the life of the world this year of 2007? Will we recognize those *kairos* moments, or will they pass us by unnoticed and ignored?

We know much more about Rosa Parks now than back then. One thing we have learned is that she had spent years, not alone, but with her people, preparing for that one moment when she refused to give up her seat to a white man. In her life, with her people, she practiced the kind of spiritual discipline that would make her attentive to life’s possibilities, so that when the right moment came, she was ready for it.

Rosa Parks could have been so weighed down by the burden of *chronos*, so weighed down by the history of her suffering and the suffering of her people, that she might never have risen to the occasion. In like manner, we can get so caught up in *chronos* that we may miss the *kairos* moments that our gracious God gives us.

In his first book *The Reality of the Gospel and the Unreality of the Churches*, Douglas Hall recalls his student internship at an old established church in New York City. This church found itself in the midst of a changing community. Once boasting a large membership and a sanctuary that seated 1500 people, the church had become a mere shell of its former

self. By the time Douglas Hall entered the scene, about 85 people gathered for worship and this number included a choir in which every singer was paid! The doors of the church were kept open because of lots of “old” money.

The church was surrounded by a community of Puerto Ricans and Blacks, none of whom were part of the congregation. Douglas recalls a meeting called to figure out what to do about the dwindling church school. The minister of the church presided over the meeting, which included a couple of teachers, Douglas himself, and the parish visitor, a kind, unpretentious, but also unaware pleasant woman who was employed to care for the needs of church members. “This area,” the minister announced, “is the most densely populated area in the entire world.” He went on to describe the social problems of the people living in the neighborhood: rape, drugs, robbery, murder, suicide, organized crime – the works!

At the end of his long presentation he paused and then announced dramatically, “This is our parish.” At that moment, there was a knock on the door of the parlor in which everyone was meeting. As Douglas Hall describes it,

Somebody had left the door a little ajar, and the visitor didn’t wait for it to be opened, but pushed it back rather rudely. There she stood, an overweight, homely little Puerto Rican girl, perhaps twelve or thirteen years of age.

“What time is it?” she demanded uncouthly, apparently unimpressed by our sedate little assembly.

The minister’s face went hard with indignation. He looked around at all of us, obviously annoyed by this untimely interruption. Then he called out to the girl: “Can’t you see we’re having an important meeting here? Now run along . . . and don’t bother us again!”

After an embarrassed silence, the parish visitor said quietly, trying as best she could to correct the situation, “She’s not one of ours, you know.”

The girl’s question, “What time is it?” could have become a special moment, a revelatory, or *kairos* moment, for that congregation. The response to the girl’s question could have been: “What time is it? Of course, it’s time to let go of our old established ways and reach into our

surrounding community with creativity and imagination.” Instead, the question was dismissed and the moment, fraught with possibility, was ignored.

“What time is it?” It’s a good question to ask ourselves. My friends, I trust that we will not be so weighed down by time’s burdensome quality that we will miss those gracious times and opportunities that God gives us for newness of life. The spirit of God may be ready to break through the ordinary, chronological time that marks our days, and present us with those special moments when life can be made new if we but respond faithfully. Let us look attentively for those moments and be ready to say “yes” to them whenever they present themselves to us. So will we ourselves be that new creation for which long, and so will the world be made new. Amen.