

Resources for Communities of Ongoing Religious Exploration

V. 2 Unit 3

Time: Kronos vs Kairos

Suggested Chalice Lighting

There are two ways to live: you can live as if nothing is a miracle; you can live as if everything is a miracle.

~Albert Einstein

I. Introduction

The ancient Greeks had two words for time: chronos and kairos. As you might suspect from its use in words like chronology, chronos refers to sequential time, measurable and regular. It is what we usually mean when we say time. Kairos, in contrast, has a qualitative connotation. It refers to a proper or opportune time for action (as you might say, "it is time"). The plural, kairoi means 'the times.' Kairos is used to refer to the precise moment at which an archer can release an arrow with the proper amount of force.

In theology, kairos is often used to indicate the appointed time, the time of divine activity.

Its use is not limited to mark an exact moment, but also the experience or expanse of time within such moments. Kairos defines those times of reverie, when time seems nonexistent or irrelevant, as during the spiritual experience of ritual or meditation.

II. CONNECT: Readings

Chronology, the time which changes things, makes them grow older, wears them out, and manages to dispose of them, chronologically, forever. Thank God there is kairos too: again the Greeks were wiser than we are. They had two words for time: chronos and kairos. Kairos is not measurable. Kairos is ontological. In kairos we are, we are fully in isness, not negatively, as Sartre saw the isness of the oak tree, but fully, wholly, positively. Kairos can sometimes enter, penetrate, break through chronos: the child at play, the painter at his easel, Serkin playing the Appassionata are in kairos. The saint in prayer, friends around the dinner table, the mother reaching out her arms for her newborn baby are in kairos. The bush, the burning bush, is in kairos, not any burning bush, but the particular burning bush before which Moses removed his shoes; the bush I pass by on my way to the brook. In kairos that part of us which is not consumed in the burning is wholly awake.

Madeleine L'Engle

Kronos, the god of the world and time, was the most important of the Elder Gods. He devoured his own children to prevent them from replacing him as the supreme god, but his wife saved their last son, Zeus, who eventually overthrew his father's relentless rule of life and death. By contrast, Kairos was one of the subtlest gods in the Greek pantheon. Kairos was the god of lucky chance. He personified numinous moments of time giving birth to novelty and surprise.

Drawing on these ancient mythic images, we can revisit the two kinds of time with deeper understanding. Kronos devours us with remorseless certainty. Kronos turns life into stone. Kairos is creative and serendipitous. Kairos is time that is energized by the living dream of the future and presents us with unlimited possibility. We are not helpless to tip the balance in the direction of kairos over kronos. We can temper our fear and our fixation on sequential time. We can deepen our quest and our experiences of numinous time. In such synchronicity of kronos and kairos lies our deepest consolation and our steepest aspiration.

Lonnie Kliever

My father passed away several years ago, but these words are a bittersweet reminder that timeless wisdom often extends beyond a chronological life's last breath. By embracing the idea of kairos, we move beyond chronology and begin to view our time and our entire life in nonlinear, expansive terms, opening up to rich opportunities for inspiration. Through this simple change in perspective, we begin to see how we too can travel through time, and how we can even connect to eternity, as our words, art, and actions of today can reverberate throughout the universe forever.

Marney Makridakis

First off, inside our walls, we tend to (over) value chronos time. Everything has to be planned, scheduled, calendarized, reduced to individual tasks, etc. And this isn't bad, in fact, it's necessary to a good degree to operate a business. But we have to realize that the marketplace outside of our walls is very kairotic. Consumers will be ready to adopt a new product or service when they will – not when we're simply able to produce it. Finally, there is a reason to think about our approach to time on an interpersonal level. As humans, we're either oriented primarily as "chronos" people or "kairos" people. Chronos people like to get ahead of the game and pursue particular paths. They plan ahead to reduce their stress. People oriented in kairos, on the other hand, like to leave their options open and let the world unfold in front of them. They reduce their stress by creating contingency plans. The point is that neither one is "better" but that both are necessary to effectively plan and move organizations forward.

Justin Royer

III. GROW: Questions for consideration and discussion

1. *Chronos* provides a means of structuring and organizing our lives and activities. For many people, it is a source of comfort in planning and scheduling, to mitigate

chaos and disorder. For others, *chronos* feels constricting, as control or pressure exerted by an exterior force. What is the nature of your relationship with *chronos*?

2. Can you recall a recent experience of *kairos*, when measured time seemed to disappear or become irrelevant? What was happening, and what were you doing, in that experience?
3. Kairos moments can be times of mystical experience or artistic creativity, but they are sometimes disorienting periods of confusion or chaos. How do you feel about or relate to the experience of *kairos*?
4. Chronos people are often regarded as more punctual and reliable, but also more rigid and bound to routine. Kairos people are often seen as more spontaneous and creative, but also more unreliable and disorganized. Are you more oriented to *kairos* or *chronos*?
5. In what ways might your life be different, if you had a different time-orientation? How might you try to explore this possibility?
6. How does it feel when you must engage with someone whose time-orientation is the opposite of your own?

IV. SERVE: Taking it home

In her book, *Creating Time: Using Creativity to Reinvent the Clock and Reclaim Your Life*, Marney Makridakis offers a series of exercises to increase experience and utilization of *kairos* time. She asserts, “*Kairos* represents numinous time. The dictionary definitions of *numinous* include “supernatural, spiritual, mysterious, holy, filled with the sense of the experience of divinity, appealing to the higher emotions or to the aesthetic sense.”

As you begin each day, take a moment to consider how you might find or create an experience of *kairos*. Perhaps it is in time alone, or an encounter with nature, or interacting with another person. As the day ends, consider whether it worked and how you might repeat or alter the practice for the next day.

V. Conclusion

Was the discussion interesting? Or did it get bogged down or off track? How might you have approached the topic differently?

Were there moments in which you felt uncomfortable? Confused? Anxious? Affirmed? Eager? Hopeful? Surprised? What other feelings did you encounter?

If people in the group would like, allow them to share these things, without interrogation or challenge.

Suggested closing words:

Time as strong embrace

Enveloping a deep wish

Whispering secrets

~Marney Makridakis