

Time in the Desert-living in the Now

Mathew 4:1-11 and 2 Corinthians 6:2

Memories of childhood are few and far between, especially early childhood. One persistent early childhood memory I've retained is of living in Westport on the South Island's West Coast. My father, a railway man, spent part of his life in this small West Coast town. Our house had a bay window facing the street and I still remember watching at the window as a blind man tapped his way past our house. I remember little else save that the picture is always associated in my mind with the song.

**"The clock stopped,
Never to go again
When the old man died."**

Now, many years later, I'm more conscious than ever that I'm the older person and that the clock governing my life, ticking away my hours and days, will one day stop, never to go again.

That's not being morbid. It's the reality of passing time.

Talking of time and its passing it's hard to imagine Christ's forty days and forty nights in the desert-that time we celebrate each year as Lent. Time is elastic and difficult to grasp. Forty days and nights in the desert seem interminable, yet, forty days and nights on a round the world trip passes in a flash.

But before the clock stops, never to go again and the old man dies let me tell you of a Biblical phrase that keeps coming back into my mind like that childhood memory.

It's the phrase
Now is the most favourable time"

Writing to the Church at Corinth - 2 Corinthians 6:2 - Paul declares,
"In a favourable time I heard you and in a day of salvation I have helped you. Behold now is the most favourable time, behold now is the day of salvation."

"Now is the most favourable time" or as the Good News Bible has it,
"This is the hour to receive God's favour; to-day is the day to be saved."

In English we don't distinguish time. One word fits all.

Greek has two words for time, **Chronos and Kairos**

Chronos is moving measurable time.

It's watch time.

It's the clock-stopped time.

It's quantitative time. Chronic, chronicle, chronometer are words that come from this word.

Chronic illness lasts a long time. A chronicle records events a record of measured time. A chronometer measures hours, minutes and seconds

Forty days and forty nights is measurable, it's recordable.

That's **Chronos**.

The other word for time is **Kairos**.

Kairos is decisive time, Now time, qualitative time. You can't measure it.

You experience it.

The childhood game, "What's the time Mr Wolf?" illustrates the difference.

"What's the time Mr Wolf? One o'clock"....Chronos time.

"What's the time Mr Wolf? Lunch time!" Kairos time. Opportunity time.

In the desert our Lord experiences both Chronos and Kairos time. Forty days and nights is Chronos time. His confrontation with the tempter and the critical decisions he makes is Kairos time.

It's time as Kairos I want you to remember. It's in the phrase **"Now is the favourable..the kairos... time...now is the day of salvation."**

It's a Biblical phrase with important things to tell us

About the importance of facing reality

Time faces us with two temptations. One's to recall and revel in the past, the glory days.. To get out the nostalgia brush and paint a picture of the past in vivid and perhaps over exaggerated colours.

The other is to look out the window and prophesy the future joining hands with all the pundits who forecast the future shape of the world, society and the Church

Make no mistake, the Bible's alive with passages that talk of the past. Israel is enjoined constantly to remember the past, their deliverance

from bondage to freedom. The great redemptive blessings of life and faith should never be forgotten

But there are dangers in looking back. Lot's wife and the pillar of salt's a constant reminder of the perils of hankering for what's behind. The NT chimes in with the same warning. "Leaving those things that are behind let us press forward...."

The Bible also deals with the future. Our future as Christians, to be sure is painted in vivid colours of hope. Every time the clock stops for someone, we read the words "'I saw a new heaven and a new earth...for the old has passed away. "

Or conversely we can languish in despair and meaninglessness seeing no future worth talking about. But to try and predict the future other than in words of hope is a futile and unrewarding pastime

That's why the phrase, **Now is the appropriate time**, is important. It's a perceptive and realistic way of explaining time as "**Now.**"

It about the need to face life realistically

Nothing ever happened in the past. It only ever happens in the "Now"
Nothing ever will happen in the future. It only happens in the Now
To day is the Kairos-the favourable time the only time we have.

Listen to Jesus. "Take no thought for the morrow...a lesson he under girds in the story of a man intent on establishing his future: "I will pull down my barns and build bigger"

But the angel, says Jesus, stepped into his well appointed dining room and uttered the memorable words," Fool, this night your soul will be required of you"

Listen to James who underlines the same reality concerning those who say, "I will go down to the city and do this and that...Fools! Your life is only a vapour"

The "Now" the Kairos moment. It's the only time we have.

Realism says live for day
gratefully...redemptively...thoughtfully...generously...courageously.

I was privileged to spend some time living and studying in Texas.

Whilst there, historic old First Baptist Church at Houston became vacant.

They called a young and enterprising pastor from another State to be their pastoral leader. The Church had fallen on tough times. Congregational numbers had dropped, the future looked bleak but they had a huge endowment fund. The first thing the new Pastor did after walking about Houston and reading up on the Church's history was suggest they spend the fund on a concentrated programme of evangelism. The Church leaders were shocked and reminded the brash newcomer that the money was being kept for a rainy day.

"Well" said the newly arrived Pastor. "I have news for you. I've read the Church's books, I've looked at the situation we are in, I've walked the streets of the city and I can tell you it's already pouring down "

Realism demanded he do something now. Realism demanded they spend the long held funds on the challenges facing them now.

To day is the appropriate time. Now is the only time we have. Always you and I live in the Now.

This is not a plea for facile optimism or rash foolhardiness. Its not a plea for belligerence disguised as evangelism, its not a plea to ignore the time honoured traditions of the Faith or to deny the need for planning and positive thinking about the future. Its simply God's way of saying the only day, the salvation day, God's kairos time is always **NOW**

It's about the need to seize opportunity

If **Now** realises life's realities it also highlights life's opportunities.

Kairos time is opportunity time. Writing to the Ephesians Paul says; "redeem the time" The word's a market place word. It can be translated "Buy up the opportunities"

For several years the Church here at Milford held jumble sales in the hall. People queued, waiting eagerly to get in when the doors opened. The rush was unstoppable as crowds hit the stalls scooping up bargains' rushing from white elephant to clothes to books

Every bargain was an opportunity and they were going to buy them up before they were gone.

That's what Paul's saying here. 'Now is opportunity time. Keep your eyes skinned for opportunities. Take them when they come.'

Opportunity's depicted in ancient Greek sculpture as a young man with a forelock of hair but a baldhead at the back. Opportunity can be grasped when it's coming toward you. There's nothing to grab once it's past! **Now's** the appropriate time...the opportunity time for you. What shape those opportunities will take isn't always clear but come they do and like shoppers at the jumble sale of life we have to buy up the opportunities because **Now's** the appropriate time.

If there's one more thing this Biblical phrase says is

It's about the need to act decisively

Whatever age we are life confronts us with the need to make decisions. Whether as individuals or as a community of faith the opportunities of God call for decisive action. That's why **Kairos** is sometimes called **crisis time**. Crisis is the moment of judgment, the moment of decision, the time that's appropriate. Appropriate because it calls from us that act of decisive commitment that shapes who we are and what we are.

One decision above all others shapes who we are as Christians and what we are as a Christian community. That's the decision to build life on the solid rock of commitment to Jesus as leader and Lord. For Christians that's the decisive commitment, the only permanent conviction in a raft of moving and changing decisions and opportunities.

This decisive commitment is what enables us as Christians and as a Christian community to decide what we'll commit to and should govern the decisions we make.

As the writer to the Hebrews says:

"Keep your eyes fixed on Jesus Christ on whom faith depends from start to finish."

We can sit lightly to most of our convictions, because they'll change as life unfolds. The make up of this Church is notably different from what it

was twenty or forty years ago. Life too, is radically different for this present generation to what it was for past generations of the Church. But one conviction shapes the decisions of Christian believers and the Christian community in every generation. That's absolute and decisive commitment to Jesus Christ on whom our Faith depends from start to finish.

Professor Herbert Butterfield, Professor of Modern History at Cambridge University in the immediate post war years, in a brief but masterly survey entitled "Christianity and History" concludes by saying that Christianity, faith in the God revealed in Jesus Christ is not tied to the spirit, ideas or ideologies of any age past, present or future. Nor is the Christian faith tied to regimes of the left, right or centre. He then finishes with words that could well have come out of the Letter to the Hebrews:

"I have nothing to say except that if one wants a permanent rock in life and goes deep enough for it, it is difficult for historical events to shake it. There are times when we are locked into our contemporary systems of thought and are not free to meet the demands and decisions life and faith require.

We can do worse than remember a principle which both gives us a firm Rock and leaves free to meet whatever new circumstances or situations should arise: the principle: **Hold fast to Christ and for the rest be totally uncommitted.**"

Recent Christchurch earthquakes remind us that life can change dramatically in a brief second of time. Circumstances, fads fashions and attitudes may and will change. Church buildings may eventually be bulldozed down, become plumbers yards or up market restaurants. But Christ and the community built on him remains because it has the eternal **Now** written into it.

The greatest thing we can do is give expression to that eternal **Now** by living realistically courageously and decisively with the opportunities each day brings until,

**"The clock stops, never to go again
And the old man dies."**