

## Reflections on Becoming Children of God

John 1:10-14, 16-17

*But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God, who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of human will, but of God...From his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace.*

On New Year's morning during my time of prayer and meditation, I thought about the fact that I have never really gotten into the celebration of New Year. It has to do with calendar time or clock time. The Greek word is *kronos*. *Kronos* is a human creation that we impose on reality. It is something linear that gives us the feeling of control, like watches and clocks and PDA's, and timelines in history books. *Kronos* also fills us with fear about time flying by, year after year, as we move toward life's end. When we live by *kronos* time, we are living from "the outside in," always measuring ourselves to see if we are making progress or achieving something or whatever. We feel hopeful when things go the way we think they should, but fall into despair when they don't. So we come to another New Year assessing our gains and losses, our successes and failures. We make some resolutions with the hope that we might feel better at the end of the year. All of this came to my mind as I thought about *kronos* time.

There is another word for time--*kairos*. It is the word preferred in our scriptures. The passage from 1 Peter for this week is talking about *kairos* with regard to the significance of Jesus. I did not read this passage this morning, but here is just a bit of it: "With all wisdom and insight God has made known to us the mystery of his will, according to God's good pleasure that God set forth in Christ, as a plan for the fullness of time, to gather up all things in him..."(1:8-10) The writer sees Jesus' life, death, and resurrection as an "event" of God's grace and love. It is a "moment" in which the fullness of God was manifest in the world. That "moment" is *kairos*. It is life in relationship with God. *Kronos* gives us the illusion of control and fills us with anxiousness. *Kairos* offers a life of fulfillment and joy. *Kronos* is running around all day glancing anxiously at your watch. *Kairos* is taking your watch off, sticking it in your pocket, and opening your eyes and mind and heart. *Kairos* is the life of discipleship to Jesus, of being rooted and grounded in him who is our true humanity. *Kronos* is marking time. *Kairos* is making the most of our lives.

When we take up the spiritual life, we are shifting from *kronos* to *kairos*. We are moving from living according to some outward measure of ourselves and our lives, to living from the inside, from our relationship with God. The Gospel of John calls it being given "power to become children of God." John's gospel uses the image of a second birth. Our physical birth and life are not the whole of who we are. There is a second birth, an awakening to ourselves as spiritual beings so that we live with awareness of God and our relationship with God. I think that is what it means to live in *kairos*, the fullness of time, not just crossing of days on the calendar, not just "putting in" time.

That is what we try to be about here in the Church of the Covenant--receiving the power God gives us in Jesus to become children of God. We speak of the spiritual life as an inward and outward journey. It is a different way of living, and it takes a willingness to be intentional about it, to make a commitment to our own lives in God, and to take responsibility for our own spiritual lives. It means being church in a different way—a community of those who have made and are daily making a commitment to discipleship, to following Christ and what we believe that means in our lives. It means working daily with our inward life through times of silence, meditation, reflection, study, and prayer. Becoming children of God means living from the inside out, from what we feel God is calling us to be and to do for the sake of the world. It means seeing what gift or gifts God has given us to use in the nourishing of life around us. The spiritual life as we try to work with it here is the practice of touching the power of God in Jesus that enables us to become children of God, awakening to our full humanity.

All of this is not “church membership” in the usual way--putting your name on a church roll and then receiving certain religious services. This is a point of confusion for some who come to the Church of the Covenant. No one pursues you or tries to get you to “sign up,” as it were. We simply offer the possibility of making that commitment to your own spiritual awakening and deepening, to living your life from the inside out. I am reminded quite frequently how different this is, and how for some it leads to disappointment and disillusionment. The Church of the Covenant is not here to fulfill people’s expectations of having found a perfect spiritual community. We are here because we believe that the Gospel of Jesus Christ calls us to respond to God’s gracious love with our whole being. We know how difficult that is and how much we need a community in order to make any progress at it. And we know that our own frailties and weaknesses, as well as those of others, are part of growing into the love that is of God.

In the Church of the Covenant, we don’t like to talk in terms of success and failure. I am suspicious even of the word progress when it comes to the spiritual life. Those are *kronos*-type words. Living according to *kairos*, the life of the spirit, the life of becoming children of God, is a lot less predictable. It brings changes and challenges, and sometimes you do things that don’t make sense to the *kronos* mentality. The missions that we feel called to often become something very different from what we first envisioned, IF we are being faithful to the inward journey of being attentive to the leading of God’s spirit. What we thought we were supposed to be doing with our lives can often be overthrown once we start really paying attention to our inner life, once we begin listening more deeply to who we are in the uniqueness with which God made us. A mission can serve its time, its purposefulness, and then end, without necessitating a sense of failure. Holding onto things can get in the way of the new things God wants to do. The question becomes “What new thing is God calling me or us to?” A change in our personal life situation can open up a whole new opportunity for responding to God’s call and offering our gifts, IF we are paying attention through the inward journey.

Things have changed for me within the past year. I have felt an increasing call to give my time and energy to some things and not to others. I have shared my struggles and searchings most frequently with the Festival Center Mission Group through my accountability reports, but also with the Chrysalis Mission Group and with the Covenant Members. My first nearly six years here have centered around two missions. The first has been the Festival Center as a place in the central city where we could be in community with and service to persons who live in the College Hill and Fifth Street neighborhood. This past October marked the fifth anniversary of the opening of the Festival Center. Then there emerged for me the vision of developing a retreat dimension to this unique, beautiful, and peaceful property shared by Camp Kum Ba Yah, Lynchburg Covenant Fellowship, and the Church of the Covenant. Chrysalis Interfaith Retreat Center was born, with a mission group at the center of it. Being so involved with two missions and two mission groups, along with all the other things that need to be done as pastor, began to take its toll. I needed to come to terms with the reality that I had not been giving time, focus, and energy to the things that I personally have felt most deeply called to – music and writing, both of which need a more contemplative pace of life than I had allowed myself.

A year or so of paying much closer attention to my own spiritual life has led to some changes. I decided to take early retirement so far as my income is concerned, with the church continuing to provide my health insurance. I will continue to work in particular areas—preaching, preparation of worship, working with those moving toward membership, and pastoral care. I will continue to serve on the Festival Center Board, though I have withdrawn from the Festival Center Mission Group. I have discovered in my own experience the truth that one cannot be in more than one mission group IF that group is truly functioning as a mission group. I will continue to be part of the Chrysalis Mission Group and work with the retreat center mission as it continues to unfold. I will be spending some time working on these grounds and seeking ways we can provide the kind of care and upkeep needed. And I will be spending more time in study, writing, and working with music.

We have employed Hope Snell as our Administrative Assistant. Beginning tomorrow, she will be handling the day-to-day organizational details and responsibilities of our life as a community. This not only frees me to give more focused attention to the things I am truly called to do, but also gives focused attention to the practical needs of our small but somewhat complex organizational life. Hope and I, and all of us, will be living

into this new way of being throughout this year. We will learn what it means for Hope to be the “go to” person for all things administratively. Yet we want Hope to find within this much-needed service a means of expressing her own sense of call and her own gifts.

Changes in call are difficult, not only for the one working with it but for others in the community. If we are living according to call, then things can and will change. It demands that we have flexibility and a willingness to always remain open. The Festival Center Mission Group has not only been supportive of my working through these things but also has borne the brunt of the changes! However, the mission group will be continuing to meet weekly as it seeks God’s leading into a new situation. We need, as a church, to have that point of contact and community with the children, youth, and adults of the College Hill neighborhood. I hope that God will continue to call to the Festival Center persons to be part of such a center for community.

Living according to the *kairos* time of God’s leading and spirit, doing the spiritual work that enables us to become the children of God we are made to be...these are not things that comprise a straight line of progress or success or achieving victory after victory. Often it means wandering around in the wilderness, like the people of Israel who needed forty years to learn the one spiritual lesson of listening to and trusting God. Often it will bring about changes that are challenging for us and for those with whom we are in community. But I believe that the heart of the vision of the Church of the Covenant is this--if each of us is responding to God’s call in our life, out of freedom and with responsibility, if each of us is seeking and living out of what God is calling us to do with these unique lives we have and the particular gifts God has given us, then we are doing what is best for the world. God’s world most needs persons who are becoming children of God, in whom the love and Word of God are taking on flesh, are becoming incarnated.