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A little more than a year ago, Thomas Friedman published the book *Thank You For Being Late*. The book deals with the unprecedented pace of change our whole world is experiencing. Friedman says that humanity has known nothing like this since the days when Johannes Gutenberg invented his press which put the Bible, and much more, in the hands of the public. Today's change is happening because "the three largest forces on the planet — technology, globalization and climate change — are all accelerating at once." Friedman quotes a friend who said, "When you press the pause button on a machine, it stops. But when you press the pause button on human beings, they start." The point is that in times of change like this, we need to take time to catch our breath, to understand what is happening in and around us so that we can be a purposeful part of it, not just riders on a bullet train headed to an unknown destination.

Friedman's ideas offer a contemporary complement to today's readings. In the first reading, we get the cartoon-like story of Jonah warning the people of the once-largest city in the world that they have 40 days to repent or be destroyed. Then, we hear Paul tell the Corinthians to live as if time were running out. Finally, Mark tells us that Jesus began his preaching saying, "This is the time of fulfillment. The kingdom of God is at hand." Today's Scriptures call us to take a good look at our times so we can make a Gospel-inspired response.

Jesus began his preaching after John the Baptist's arrest. Although it was obviously a time of danger, he interpreted it, as what was known in his day, as a time of *kairos*, the opportune time, a moment when God's activity on earth was reaching a peak. Jesus summarized it all by saying, "The kingdom of God is at hand."

The concept of kingdom of God is elusive. Jesus talked about it in parables and analogies that described its great, contagious energy. Rather than being a place like a country or even a grouping like a church, we can describe it as a new state of mind that engenders a new way of living. It grows through a web of relationships in which people experience loving union with one another and with God. Jesus came enthusiastically inviting people into that new way of life. He showed them what it looked like through his interactions with others. He taught his disciples to pray for its coming, and he himself prayed for it during the last supper saying, "May all be one, Father, as you are in me" (John 17:10). He knew that once people experienced it, they could never settle for less.

In order to be a part of that kingdom, Jesus called for repentance and belief. For Jesus, repentance referred to a thoroughgoing change of mentality and a commitment to the vision he was preaching. Unlike the king of Nineveh who demanded that the people fast and put on sackcloth and ashes, Jesus invited people to care for one another and feast

together — on an ongoing basis.

The kingdom of God is just as near today as on that day when Jesus came to Galilee preaching about it. We are still called to repent and believe. The Second Vatican Council teaches us that in furthering Christ's mission we all share in "the duty of scrutinizing the signs of the times and of interpreting them in the light of the Gospel" (*Gaudium et Spes* #3-4). That means that we take Jesus' preaching and apply it to the world Friedman is talking about.

To read the signs of our times, we have to pause and contemplate our epoch. In "Laudato Si", on Care for Our Common Home," Pope Francis calls us to "review those questions which are troubling us today and which we can no longer sweep under the carpet." He says that by doing this we "dare to turn what is happening in the world into our own personal suffering and thus discover what each of us can do about it" (#18-19).

Peter, Andrew, James and John were called to leave their boats for the sake of the kingdom. If we wish to understand and implement Jesus' vision today, we must pause from our frenetic activity to contemplate our own reality, to cultivate what Francis calls "serene attentiveness" and gratitude to God. Only then will we be able to perceive how, as Francis says, the universe is unfolding in God.

This is our *kairos*, the only moment of history we have, and it is in our hands. Friedman says that our societies, our workplaces and geopolitics need to be reimagined. We have the formula, it's called the kingdom of God. We're called to be a purposeful part of it.

JONAH 3:1-5, 10

There are lots of ways to tell the story of Jonah. Today's liturgy gives us our prim maiden aunt's version with the pithy preaching of the prophet and the people's pious turn-around. Our delightfully outrageous young uncle would never tell the tale without the details of Jonah's flight from God into the belly of a whale or his self-absorbed annoyance at the fact that Nineveh actually repented and God reneged on the evil planned for them. Some describe the Book of Jonah as the comic strip of the Bible. But that doesn't disparage its message, it simply says that the teaching comes in a different, perhaps more entertaining package.

Of course, the end result is transformation. Jonah's full story includes his adventures in the belly of the whale and crossing Nineveh, the people's conversion and his devastation that God did not decimate the people and yet destroyed his shade tree. (Such a man of God, more concerned for a plant than for the population of the city!) The author doesn't want us to miss the references to three days: Jonah spent three days in the belly of the whale and three days crossing the city. Neither place was to his liking, but both resulted in unexpected salvation.

An ironic dimension of the story is that the power of the message far outshines the messenger. Jonah didn't want to go to Nineveh at all, but when he was backed into a corner, he went and carried his chip on his shoulder all the way through the great city as he preached. As if to spite him, the people took his message to heart. St. Thomas Aquinas created an axiom to explain this detail: "Whatever is received is received according to the mode of the receiver." Applied to this story, that explains that the people of Nineveh were more disposed to grace than was Jonah. His preaching saved them, even if it didn't affect him. The underlying message is that God calls for conversion while there is still time to change our ways.

PSALMS 25:4-5, 6-7, 8-9

In its entirety, this psalm is an acrostic, meaning that the lines or verses each begin with consecutive letters of a word or phrase. In this case, it is the Hebrew alphabet. That form makes it easier to memorize the prayer or, as we say, to learn it by heart.

Knowing by heart is what this psalm is all about. We pray, "Your ways, O Lord, make known to me, teach me your paths." That can be taken in two ways. On the one hand, it prays that we may learn what it means to live out God's plan for humanity. "Knowing" in this sense is experiential. Because we learn best by doing, to know God's ways means that by walking God's path through our life, we will become more adept at doing God's will with every step we take.

We can also interpret the request to know the ways of the Lord as an appeal to understand how God relates to humanity. That leads to contemplation of God's ways: "Your compassion ... and your love are from of old." We are thus invited to

recall how God has led humanity through the ages and how God's grace has been active in our own lives.

The final verse of the psalm repeats one of the lessons of the story of Jonah and the Ninevites: God can only teach us as much as we are willing to learn. Only the humble are open to divine guidance; only those who admit they are sinners can experience God's compassion. This psalm leads us to be in touch with God's love and to pray that we may live it out. We need to pray Psalm 25 from our heart, otherwise it will be no more for us than a clever acrostic.

1 CORINTHIANS 7:29-31

Today's short selection from 1 Corinthians might be dismissed as something written in a very different time and place, scarcely applicable to our times. Some commentators think Paul was speaking of an imminent end of the world — something we know didn't happen. Others say that Paul was referring to the end of a way of living; the world his community knew was quickly losing meaning in the light of Christ's resurrection. The more people came to understand Christ, the more the meaning of their world was changing.

To understand this reading better, we should know how Paul understood time. In his conceptual world there were two kinds of time. Chronos is the time that passes in regular, measurable intervals, of seconds, weeks and centuries. It is always the same. Then, there is time called kairos, the meaning-filled dimension of time. The time Paul talks about here, is kairos, grace-infused time, the kind of time that calls forth life-changing decisions. Paul told the Corinthians that their kairos had come: The old world was passing away because Christ was risen. It was time to give all their energy and attention to the new reality happening among them.

Our situation today is different but hardly less urgent. According to what Francis has written in *Laudato Si'*, the most pressing and universal problem of our day is environmental destruction. Francis sounds like Paul and imitates his passion as he laments that efforts to seek solutions to the environmental crisis have been stymied by powerful opposition, lack of interest, obstructionist attitudes, denial, indifference, resignation or blind confidence in technical solutions. Just as Paul suggested that the Corinthians adjusted to the most basic dimensions of their lives to respond to their times, Francis is calling for a "new and universal solidarity" to "redress the damage caused by human abuse of God's creation" (#14).

Where Paul and Pope Francis coincide most closely is in seeing the demands of their times as extraordinarily urgent. Francis addresses his appeal to all people living on this planet because it is imperative that the whole human family become involved in seeking sustainable development. Although he wrote to all people, Francis explained his certainty that solutions are possible in the light of Christian faith and hope. He reminds us that the Creator does not abandon us, that we still have the ability to work together in building our common home (#13). Neither Francis nor Paul lack hope, but they both beg us to recognize that time is running out.

MARK 1:14-20

Today's reading from Mark is like a Gospel in miniature. Mark frames John's arrest as the decisive end of the old and the beginning of the new. Jesus began his preaching saying "The time ... is at hand." This "time" is kairos: the definitive time, not a season of the liturgical year or a lunar month, but the time of fulfillment. There has never been a time like this.

The reason Jesus proclaims this as "the kairos moment" of history is that the kingdom of God is at hand. The kingdom of which Jesus spoke was not a place and it had nothing to do with governance in the normal sense of the word. As Scripture scholar James Edwards explains, Mark's Gospel never speaks of God as king, but rather of "entering the kingdom as entering a new state of being" (*The Gospel of Mark*). The kingdom of God is a reality that springs from relationship with Jesus of Nazareth. It is a state of heart and mind that comes from getting caught up in his vision of life. The kingdom of God is a way of living and thinking, a radically new orientation toward existence. It affects absolutely everything about a person's life.

As we envision today's Gospel scene, we might consider how this news affected Jesus himself. Mark has already told us that Jesus was being led by the Spirit of God (1:12). It was the Spirit who inspired him to proclaim that the new moment of history had arrived. We rarely consider the enthusiasm Jesus must have felt and exhibited as he spread this idea. Jesus believed that God was at work as never before, and that it was happening through him and the mission he was given. That announcement, Jesus' preaching to the masses, must have communicated an almost irresistible joy and hope. It led people

to repent and believe by accepting the invitation to adopt a wholly new perspective on life.

Jesus made his announcement in public, he invited the crowds, the ordinary folks in plazas and synagogues, around the seashore and on the hillsides; he wanted everybody in on it. Then, there were some others who were represented by the four fishermen we hear about today. These were the ones he invited to give themselves entirely to spreading the message with him. “They abandoned their nets and followed.”

Everyone who heard Jesus was called to recognize the *kairos* and make a decision for or against his message. Everyone who accepted him was called to learn a new way of living, a new way of hoping, a new way of understanding life and even death itself. Some were invited not just to live in that way, but to make spreading the news about it the core activity of their life. We know some of their names: the Twelve (variously named) who represented the new Israel, the women who traveled with Jesus to Jerusalem and who remained as witnesses to his crucifixion, the 72 (from Luke’s Gospel) and Paul. These, known or anonymous, shared not just Jesus’ message, but his mission journey. They gave up their ordinary occupations to go with him and learn what it meant to continue his mission. Because Jesus’ preaching of the Gospel began with the handing over of John the Baptist, they knew the risks; they had to learn that accepting the invitation to follow in this way would cost them their lives, sometimes in martyrdom, always in learning to give everything they had and were.

Today’s Gospel narrative summarizes the entire Gospel and invites us to step into it. The *kairos* time of fulfillment that began with Jesus’ preaching continues and everyone is invited to become caught up in it. It is simply a question of allowing ourselves to be so influenced by Jesus that his vision colors everything else. This Gospel also calls us to prayerfully ponder our Christian vocation and to pray particularly for those who may be called to leave everything behind to dedicate themselves to a lifetime of spreading the Gospel.

The Gospel calls for a radical response. Not everyone can or should leave their nets and boats, but all of us are called to discern God’s will and respond to our *kairos*. Like the people of Nineveh, we have time, but as Francis warns us, it is running out.

Planning: 3rd Sunday in Ordinary Time

By: Lawrence Mick

If you didn’t focus on vocations last weekend, the readings for this Sunday offer another opportunity. The first reading recounts God’s call to Jonah to be the instrument of Nineveh’s conversion. In the Gospel, Jesus calls four disciples as he begins his public ministry. (Note that we hear from Mark this Sunday, while we heard from John’s Gospel last week, both recounting the beginning of Jesus’ ministry.) If you did focus on vocations last week, you could shift the emphasis a bit and concentrate on listening today.

The call of Jonah and the disciples might also lead us to consider those who preach to us today, and the call all of us receive to preach the good news to others by word and deed. But the other side of the equation might also claim our attention: How well do we listen?

It is natural that liturgical leaders pay regular attention to the way that various liturgical ministers carry out their ministries. If the lector cannot be heard or the musicians play and sing poorly, the whole community is affected. But this attention to special ministers can lead us to overlook the assembly. This is a good opportunity to encourage all to heighten their attention to the word of God.

We all need reminding occasionally that listening is an active skill that is essential for the preaching of the word. If the preacher preaches and no one listens, the exercise is futile.

How can you help the assembly to listen more attentively? One important step is to follow the guidance found in the General Instruction of the Roman Missal (#128-136) to surround the proclamation of the word with brief moments of silence. A pause between the opening collect and the first reading allows the assembly to settle in their seats and calls

attention to the importance of what is about to happen (if only because they wonder why there is this silence!). Pauses, after the first and second reading and after the homily, allow time to reflect on what has just been heard.

It seems necessary in most assemblies, though, to teach people how to use these silent times effectively. Planners might compose an article or insert for the bulletin, explaining why the silences are there. It's probably more effective, though, if listening is the topic of a homily, perhaps even once or twice a year. Then, after the opening collect, the presider might occasionally remind the assembly to listen attentively and to use the silences to reflect on what they have heard. People might simply ask themselves two questions: What did I hear? What am I going to do in response to what I've heard?

Prayers: 3rd Sunday in Ordinary Time

By: Joan DeMerchant

Introduction

When God works with the world, it involves a call to repentance. Over the centuries, that call has been issued by many, from prophets to Jesus himself. And the call continues today. Wonderful new things happen in the reign of God, and that always involves our acting in new ways. "The time of fulfillment" is always at hand, because we are not yet totally there; and we are invited once again to be a part of it.

Penitential Act

- Lord Jesus, you called Simon, Andrew and James to discipleship: Lord, have mercy.
- Christ Jesus, you called them to repent and follow you: Christ, have mercy.
- Lord Jesus, you extend that same invitation to all of us: Lord, have merc

Prayer of the Faithful

Presider We raise our voices in prayer for all of us who are surely in need of repentance.

Minister For the universal church and for this community: That we may acknowledge our own need to repent and be a viable source of consolation for others ... we pray.

- For all the places in the world where unjust systems reflect the need for institutional repentance; and for leaders of integrity willing to address them ... we pray,
- For those who feel no need to change or who fear what this may require of them; and for times when we focus on others' need for repentance ... we pray,
- For the programs and ministries that promote the need for change and the importance of making amends ... we pray,
- For an attentive ear and open heart to hear all that God may ask of us ... we pray,
- For all of us that we might learn to listen more carefully and closely not only to God, but to one another ... we pray,
- For parents and for all who are responsible for teaching and modeling the need for repentance to our children and youth ... we pray,

Presider Compassionate God, we acknowledge that we are all in need of repentance. Grant us the humility and the courage to become the people you call us to be. Help us especially when change seems difficult, or even impossible. We choose to walk in the ways of your Son, in whose name we pray. Amen

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