

KAIROS: Celebration of New Ministry: Jennifer Henry, Executive Director
Church of the Holy Trinity [Anglican], Toronto
Monday May 7, 2012
By Paul Gehrs
Exodus 1:8 - 2:1-10; Matthew 14:22-33

According to the website,

The word kairos comes to us from the Greek word for time. Contrasting with chronos, meaning ordinary or chronological time, kairos means holy or God-given time, time laden with meaning and choice. Kairos signals a time of crisis and new possibilities, a time of repentance, renewal and decisive action. This can be a pinnacle moment, ...Kairos can also be a stream of [daily moments], that call us to act in God's name. Every time we read the signs of our world and see injustice, the meaning of [our] faith is at stake in our response. Recognizing kairos means acknowledging that the time to act for justice is now.

(<http://www.kairoscanada.org/who-we-are/about-kairos/kairos-an-introduction/>)

What kind of leadership is needed for justice initiatives?

What kind of leadership is needed for the KAIROS moments of our lives?

I invite you to take a moment to LOOK UP,

Because looking up is one way to look to God.

Look beyond the beautiful ceiling of this church, to the sky and the stars and the vastness of space.

Remember the vastness of God's love for this world.

I invite you to LOOK TO THE SIDES,

Because looking straight out to the world around you is one way to look to God

Some call this looking to the four directions.

Look beyond the walls, and beyond the horizon, as far as the eye can see and farther.

As far as you can look, there are people and creatures and creation,

Know that as far as you can see there are those whom God loves and those who need God

Some of are broken, some hungry, and some thirsting for a word of hope.

Some would say that when you look into the face a neighbour in need,

you are looking into the face of Jesus.

I invite you to look DOWN

Because looking down is another way to look to God.

Look to the ground and to the land,

And remember that everything KAIROS does is rooted in faith.

I invite you to look DEEP INSIDE

Because looking inside is another way to look to God

Be aware to God's spirit calling us to notice the KAIROS moments.

I invite you to look TO THE SCRIPTURES

Because looking to the scriptures is another way to look to God.

Matthew 14:22-33

In Matthew, the disciples find themselves in boat.
When they look up, they do not see God but rather a storm.
When they look down, they see waves battering the boat (evocative term “battering the boat...”)
When they look to the side they see a ghost
And when they look inside they see only fear.

A crisis feels like being in a boat in a storm: scary, unstable, dangerous, uncertain.

Quite symbolically, Jesus comes walking to them on the water.
In the midst of their struggles, fears and uncertainty, the disciples don’t recognize Jesus –
It is not necessarily easy to see God in the midst of the storm.

But they figure it out

One person stands out: Peter
Lord, if it is you, invite me to come to you walking on the water.
Jesus says “Go for it”
Peter gets out, starts to walk
Then he thinks “what am I doing; I can’t walk on water.”
And he begins to sink.
So Jesus hauls him out of the water, they both get into the boat

Here’s what I think:

Life has a lot of storms.

The Church and the world need leaders with Peter’s attitude.

People willing to stand up in the midst of the wind and waves,

To step out front
To go where Jesus would go, in the way that Jesus goes.
To try the seemingly impossible because it is the faithful thing to do.

This text speaks of leadership in at least 3 ways:

1. First, Jennifer, personally,

To be invited to be the Executive Director of KAIROS
May feel like stepping out of a boat in the midst of a storm
To try to do something that is relatively impossible.
Jennifer, we see in you one who is able to spot the presence of Christ
in the midst of a storm
And we see one who has the imagination and will
to be a leader – on a new, unlikely, faithful path.

I have heard you say more than once “excited and terrified”
Jesus words are “do not be afraid”
The impulse to lead is faith-filled and God is with you.

2, Second, all of us gathered here,
More of the disciples might have hopped out of the boat.
Tonight is not just about Jennifer's leadership,
Rather about the many and various that we have all been called
To seek Justice and to follow God.
Each of us has opportunities to lead and to initiate,
We are on this journey together, we face storms together,
We make ecumenical justice initiatives together.

3. Third, think big
There is only one boat: THE EARTH
All 7 billion of us, all life are in this one boat together.
The challenge before us is to build a community
where all are respected as God's children and as beloved in God's heart.

Exodus 1:8-22, Ex 2:1-10

In Exodus, the people of God find themselves enslaved by an empire.
In spite of possessing abundant wealth and power and being a dominant civilization,
the empire is scarred that one day the slaves might take over.
The response of the empire is nothing short of genocide:
Kill all male babies.

Turns out, God has a plan.
In some ways, not a very fast plan, but it is a very subversive plan.
At the very heart of this plan are God's words from later in Exodus,
"I HAVE HEARD THE CRIES OF MY PEOPLE."
A plan that says one day, when it is the right moment to move to freedom,
God is going to need a particular leader.
And in order to ensure Moses is there when the time is right,
God calls women of courage into service.

When midwives, Shiprah and Puah, look around them to the babies and the mothers they serve,
They see the face of God.
When they look deep inside, they know it is wrong to kill babies.
So in an act of civil disobedience, they do NOT carry out the order to kill the babies.
When they are called on it, they somehow manage to wiggle out of it.
They tell the king "The Hebrew mums are not like other mums;
The babies come really fast;
We can't get there fast enough.
(A powerful king with a C in biology)
And God blesses the midwives.

When Moses' Mum looks at the baby in her hands she and when she looks deep inside,
She knows that she wants her baby to live.

When she looks down she sees a basket, and decides to hide her son on the river.

And when Moses' Mum looks around for a partner, she sees her daughter Miriam,

And she sees in Miriam the capacity to be part of God's plan.

So the baby's sister is sent to watch over the baby in the basket in the river.

Miriam is so remarkable -- I imagine her as a youth

What a responsibility to watch and ensure the well being of your brother.

When I think of Miriam and I think of myself,

I wonder how she found the confidence, courage and faith to do this job.

And I think it is possible that Moses' Mum could see this ability in Miriam

Before Miriam could see it in herself.

As Miriam watches, the basket floats right to where the king's daughter is bathing;

To the very heart of the empire,

That is a KAIROS moment:

your baby brother is in the hands of the daughter of the king

who want the baby dead

WHAT IS YOUR DECISION?

Miriam walks up to the king's daughter and asks

Would you like me to find someone to nurse the baby for you?

What I call courage and *Chutzpah*

And the result is that the family is re-united,

and Moses' mum is being paid to care for her own baby!

And the result is that Moses ends up at the king's palace.

And the result is that God ends up with Moses;

Moses is formed by these women of courage and faith in his family,

And he is educated by the empire.

And God makes the king pay all the expenses.

Tonight, when I look at you Jennifer, and when I look at all of you gathered here,

I see that, like Shiphrah and Puah, you are people willing to do what is right.

I see that you, like Miriam, have a capacity to give voice to God's plans and God desires;

People who have the right words at the right moment.

I see that, like Miriam's mother, you can see in others the capacity to lead, to serve and to contribute

To building the kind of world that God desires for all.

Tonight, as a community, we are promising to remind you, Jennifer, and to remind each other,
That God's desire is for dignity and rights and sustainability;
And that this desire comes out of love for all and love of the whole creation.

We are promising to remind each other,
That God is at work in the long term,
And God will work in surprising ways, with unexpected partners, in order to renew this world.

On Saturday, I had the opportunity to walk around this neighbour a bit,
And one thing I learned is that if you look outside this wall of this church,
You will see a Labyrinth.
A Labyrinth is many things, including a prayerful way to make a journey in and a journey out.
One of the facts I have been taught about a Labyrinth is that
Sometimes when you feel you are close to the centre,
You are actually far away.
And sometimes when you feel far from the centre,
You are actually very close.

When the disciples safely make it to shore and leave the boat,
They still have a long journey to the Cross, the Resurrection and beyond.

When Miriam, Moses, their family and their people still have a long journey to freedom,
And an even longer journey to the promised land.

Today, KAIROS celebrates a new ministry, a moment of rejoicing in the good decision to appoint Jennifer Henry as the new executive director.

And we see this moment as part of a much larger journey:
God still hears the cries of God's people.
There are storms and there will be storms.
This journey involves much listening and much speaking out.

As you leave hear this evening,
May you look up,
May you look down,
May you look to scripture and to stories,
May you look around,
May you look deep inside,
And may you hear what the Spirit is saying to the church.