

KAIROS: Another Kind of Time

Jesus also said to the crowds, “When you see a cloud rising in the west, you immediately say, “It is going to rain”; and so it happens. You hypocrites! You know how to interpret the appearance of earth and sky, but why do you not know how to interpret the present time (the kairos)?”

Luke 12:54, 56

And what does the Lord require of you? But to do justice, love kindness and walk humbly with our God”.

Micah 6:8

Rooting our hope in God and confessing our temptation to despair, we dare to speak boldly because we believe that kairos demands it.

—Kairos/USA,

On the Way: From Kairos to Jubilee

War, hunger, poverty and ecological degradation—when we pick up the newspaper and read the signs of the times, it is a perplexing and sobering experience. In this complex world, interpreting the present time without confusion or despair is an immense challenge. And, as people of faith, not only are we to see and judge, but to dare to act for justice—a task ever more urgent and yet ever more risky and demanding. If we are to discern wisely, speak boldly, and act decisively, where will we find our hope and strength? Who will be our companions?

Hope comes as “God’s gift to us as we envision, seek, work, embody and pray for justice in a broken world” (*On the Way*, Kairos/USA). As an Easter people who believe in Christ Resurrected, despair, and even death, cannot ever be considered the last word. In each moment of discernment and choice, there is opportunity as well as crisis, optimism as well as despair, life as well as death. When we respond to *kairos*—God’s special moment of grace, truth and decision—with wise



Wise Words

Kairos is another kind of time altogether. It is not a human construct. It has nothing to do with clocks or calendars, but everything to do with the holiness of every moment. Rather than being measurable, it is mysterious. Instead of being predictable it is full of surprises. It is not so much inevitable as it is inexhaustible.

Tom Stella,
—The God Instinct, Heeding Your
Heart’s Unrest,

and faithful action for justice, we find our place with “friends of God, and prophets” (Wisdom 7:27). Each word of truth, each act of solidarity and each step of justice, reinforces hope and nurtures the movement of people that will make ‘another world possible’. *Kairos*, the word, is an invitation to action. KAIROS: Canadian Ecumenical Justice Initiatives—the coalition of churches and religious organizations working together for justice—is an invitation to community, a community of people living into hope and engaged in faithful action for justice in our time.

Responding to Kairos: The Time for Justice

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, such as the current challenges to churches and communities presented by globalization. *Kairos* can also be a stream of moments, daily injustices that call us to act in God’s name. Every time we read the signs of our world and see injustice, the very meaning of faith is at stake in our response. Recognizing *kairos* means acknowledging that the time to act for justice is now.

Many times throughout this century, Christians have sought to name a *kairos*. In the mid-1980s, a group of Christians in South Africa seized upon the image of *kairos* to express their sense that the struggle against apartheid had brought South Africa to an historic crossroads. They believed that they were confronted by a fundamental religious and political choice, that genuine hope for the future required a commitment to struggle against apartheid, and that the church was called to condemn apartheid and witness to hope for justice.

The South African sense of *kairos* also inspired people in other contexts to examine whether or not their societies too lived in a time of *kairos*, at an historic crossroads, confronting them and their churches with radical choices. In 1988 a group of more than one hundred Central American pastors, theologians and lay leaders concluded that their region, torn by civil wars and U.S. intervention, was in such a time. In 1989, groups of Christians from Asia, Southern Africa, and Central America joined in affirming that their countries, different in so many ways, also lived in a time of *kairos*, suffering in similar ways in the current global system and confronting similar fundamental choices in their paths forward.

Wise Words

The hour is the God-given moment of destiny not to be shrunk from but seized with decisiveness, the floodtide of opportunity and demand in which the unseen waters of the future surge down to the present. Nothing is more critical than to recognize and respond to such a moment.

—Os Guinness,
The American Hour

The idea for Kairos/USA emerged among Americans who, in 1990, were anticipating celebrations of the 500th anniversary of Columbus' arrival in the Americas in 1492. They were challenged by indigenous peoples to reflect, critically and prophetically, on the significance of the arrival of European Christian culture, and to rethink "celebrations" of its 500th anniversary in 1992. Their publication, *On the Way: From Kairos to Jubilee*, testifies to the sense of an arrival at an historic crossroads with the need for fundamental choices. It links the domestic and global dimensions of crisis, pointing to ecological issues as the "possibility of catastrophe at the heart of creation."

As the 1990s progressed, the sense of being at an historic crossroads grew more intense around the world. Kairos Europa was created from a broad network of European Christians to seek "a socially just, life-sustaining and democratic Europe." And at the close of the twentieth century, the Canadian Ecumenical Jubilee Initiative (CEJI) emerged within the ecumenical inter-church coalitions and the denominations, taking on profoundly theological dimensions, and seeking hopeful solutions to the moments of crisis and time for action identified in the rich *kairos* tradition. CEJI drew on the biblical image of jubilee to name the growing sense around the world of readiness for a new beginning in history.

The Year of Jubilee, coinciding with the dawn of a new millennium, resonated with a sense of both end times and a new beginning, a time full of great hopes but also of great fears for the future. Inspired by the over-arching symbol of jubilee, CEJI stitched together a variety of organizations representing different constituencies addressing many social justice and eco-justice campaigns — from debt cancellation for poor nations to climate change and indigenous land rights— as different aspects of a shared hope for the world. Jubilee invited us to pause, reflect, pray together, celebrate joyfully, refresh and renew ourselves and our churches.

Each community that has seized upon this image of *kairos* in word and action has contributed to the development of a living tradition. It is in this stream of faithful witness that KAIROS: Canadian Ecumenical Justice Initiatives finds its place.

KAIROS

Kairos..the words and the movements

- Mid 1980s: Challenge to the Church: The Kairos Document South African Christians struggling against apartheid
- 1988: Kairos Central America 100 Central American pastors, theologians and lay leaders speaking out on civil war and strong US intervention
- 1989: The Road to Damascus: Kairos and Conversion Third World Christians from diverse countries racked by civil strife
- Early 1990s: On the Way: From Kairos to Jubilee US Christians reflecting on the 500th anniversary of Columbus' arrival
- 1998: European Kairos Document European Christians responding to the deregulated global economy and competitive culture
- 1998-2001: Jubilee...A Time for a New Beginning The Canadian Ecumenical Jubilee Initiative
- July 2001 to the present: KAIROS: Canadian Ecumenical Justice Initiatives