

# SERMONS FROM ST. FRANCIS

December 2, 2007

Text: Romans 13:11-14

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## “Do You Know What Time It Is?”

Do you know what time it is? Please do not look at your watches. I haven't even begun to preach! According to St. Paul, we do know what time it is. As Paul says:

*“You know what time it is, how it is now the moment for you to wake from sleep.”*

Paul is not talking about some end time of the world. There's always some pathetic person or group setting up a date and then, if they haven't visited death on themselves, slinking away into the morning dawn consumed with refiguring their bible computations.

When Jesus advises us to be ready for the advent of that Human One of God –this florid apocalyptic language is mistakenly read literally as an event in time. Two working in the field, one is taken and one left behind. Two in the kitchen one is taken and one is left behind.

A million dollar book industry has developed, built on people's fears and anxieties about being “left behind.” Frankly, given the poor theology of the “left behind” books, I would prefer to be left behind with the rest of the leftovers. They would be far more interesting people. Our God is not a god of escapism.

But this whole religious industry is a misunderstanding of Paul and Jesus' words about time. Too often it's based on anxiety, guilt and fear. But Paul is not speaking to you in anxiety, guilt and fear when he reminds us, yes reminds us, that

*You know what time it is, how it is now the moment for you to wake from sleep.*

The apostle Paul is speaking to us not because we lack, but because we are not taking advantage of what we have been given. He is not manipulating our anxieties, guilt and fears, but is exhorting us to exercise the gifts of faith, hope and love God has given to us.

When Paul says, “You know what time it is” he is not talking about chronological time. The Greek word for time here is not *chronos* –for *chronos* is what we mean by time as clocks, watches, you know, chronological time. The Greek word is *kairos* for which we really do not have a good English equivalent. Let me try to show you what *kairos* means.

I remember saying at breakfast on September 11<sup>th</sup>, 2001 that I had just heard on the morning news that a plane had just crashed into the World Trade Towers. It all went downhill from there. An ordinary breakfast *chronos* time was swept away by a huge catastrophe that gave painful birth to a new kind of time, a *kairos* time, a new era of war and fear in America and all over the world. Ordinary time didn't fit any more. The clocks still ticked chronologically, but we had been changed into a dubious new era of war and fear.

It was this kind of expansive sense of time in Paul's mind when he tells the Romans, "You know what *time* it is." That is, "You know what *kairos* it is." You know that a new era has come with Christ and you have been baptized into that era, that *kairos*. It's all to be different now. In the midst of the old times, the old eras, and even the post-9/11 era, you have the power to be Christ to your neighbor.

What is unique about that *kairos* is its initial victory over evil in the cross and with full victory yet to come. This is the "in between time" in which we live. A victory of grace and justice begun but not completed. The church came to express this special concept of time, the *kairos*, as Christ has come and Christ will come again.

Paul's point is that we know that this is the right time. Forget the clocks and watches –they only tick away our lives. But the time we live in and live by, is a time that gives us hope. We know this time, this *kairos*, began when God was revealed so clearly in the living flesh, blood, spirit of Jesus. We know this *kairos* time when Jesus embraced all –everyone, everyone with teachings and actions that brought new compassion and justice.

But Paul is also saying that we know the *kairos* time gives us the same power to hold up those beaten down by times of war, disease, family disorder and prejudice. We are to be a transformative people living by this new sense of time in the midst of evil times. We are people of the *kairos* time in the midst of broken times, broken hopes, and a broken world.

I spoke to a very preppily dressed African American friend outside Safeway yesterday. He reminded me of the *kairos* time as he told me that on the last of his many shopping trips to his local Safeway he was pulled aside and searched. He had on a tight jacket that could not have hidden anything while his white partner of many years had a fulsome coat. They insisted on only searching him because he was black.

He painfully told me that what they did was not right and that justice was yet to come in the struggle against racial prejudice. He doubted he would see it in his lifetime. But he held out hope that later generations of blacks would not have to face such humiliation. That time will come.... That time is here and yet it obviously is not complete. We are heirs of that promising *kairos*.

As the clock ticks its endless chronological time and evil still laughs, we, who have been baptized by water and spirit, won't let that ticking time defeat us. Christ is risen and Christ will come again. That's the kind of time we live in. A time of advent hope.

Paul also says: "now is the moment for you to wake from sleep." Here Paul speaks of a sleep either in our not realizing what power we have in Christ's time, Christ's *kairos*, or a sleep numbed from the blows of evil, of guilt, of prejudice as my friend seemed headed for?

Paul is saying to us, "You know what time it is, it is the advent of Christ who has come and who will come again." So in that special kind of time, for which this little church exists completely, wake from your sleep, wake from the numbing that evil has exacted on you, and, by God's grace, speak out, stand up, take a full breath and, with all the might of your spirit, live for what Christ died for: forgiveness, freedom, and living for a just, humane and compassionate society. You are not alone. We are all baptized and forgiven. We have all been set free for good works.

So, as Paul says to the Romans, he says to us: Let us live in "Christ-time." Let us awaken. Let us live honorably, not in reveling and drunkenness, not in wasting ourselves, not in quarreling and jealousy. Instead, put on Jesus Christ, and put aside selfish ways. Live in Christ! Live for others. We live in an extraordinary time. Your God will not be found by escaping from life. Your God will be found in Mary's warm and earthly arms! It is our time. Amen

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