



**Centre Congregational Church, UCC
Brattleboro, Vermont
December 24, 2023
7:00pm service**

**The Reverend Dr. Scott Couper
Transcribed by A.I.**

Christmas Eve Candlelight Service

Let us pray. *“O Loving God, may I proclaim that which you proclaim. May we hear and may we demonstrate that which you proclaim. Amen.”*

When I ministered in South Africa, I learned about a proclamation of liberation entitled “The Kairos Document”. I brought with me here to the church a copy of it published in the mid-1980s.

The powerful document described two conceptions of time found in Greek philosophical thought and language. The first one you and I are most familiar with: *chronos*. *Chronos* is the time that is demonstrated on the clock at the rear of the sanctuary that keeps this message brief. *Chronos* is the time in which you and I mostly live. *Chronos* is ordinary time where one minute follows after another and one hour, and one day, one month follows one another, *chronologically*, one after the other (*All I Really Want*, p. 49).

The Kairos Document describes another conception of time that is found in our scriptures and that is *kairos*. *Kairos* is a time that interrupts. It is a time when God creates a lynchpin in time-space continuum to offer God’s people a unique opportunity, choice, or change. *Kairos* is a time for decisive action. *Kairos* is a time of truth. It’s almost, one might say, a stepping-out of time to create a new reality because it is God’s time.

[“*Kairos* is the Greek word that is used in the Bible to designate a special moment of time when God visits his people to offer them a unique opportunity for repentance and conversion, for change and decisive action. It is a time for judgement.

It is a moment of truth, a crisis. (See for example: Mark 1:15, 13:33, Luke 8:13, 19:44, Romans 13:11-13, I Corinthians 7:29, II Corinthians 6:2, Titus 1:3, Revelation 1:3 and 22:10)”.]¹

Think about it this way, in *Kairos* almost every moment is one, it is what Quinn Caldwell described as a “collapsing of time” (*All I Really Want*, p. 49). Thus, *kairos* is a very special time when and present and future are compressed. *Kairos* is a time when you experience your first Christmas and your last Christmas, Jesus’ birth and the redemption of all Creation at the end of time.

I have sort of experienced *kairos* time with my children when we decorated our Christmas tree. As we placed ornaments on the tree, we recalled where and when the ornaments were acquired and even for and from whom. In doing so, we remembered this year and that year. Thus, we celebrated the past as well as celebrated the present. While we decorated, I even envisioned their future children and my great-grandchildren in my mind’s eye. Past, present, and future, for me, were the same in that moment.

[Not preached in the sermon is following adapted extract from Quinn Caldwell’s book entitled *All I Really Want* (December 10, p. 48-49): “One of my favorite things about the rituals attached to this time of year is the way they mess with time. My family decorates our Christmas tree, and as we do, we find that we're not just standing in the living room we share, but we're also standing in "footie" pajamas in the living rooms we grew up in, decorating every tree we've ever decorated, right in that moment. It's more than nostalgia. Theologians would say that we're stepping out of "*chronos*" or regular time, and into "*kairos*" or God's time”.]

When we light candles with the light of Christ this evening, we will, I hope, experience a *kairos* moment. The moment will be an opportunity when we can experience the genesis of Creation. Remember, “Let there be light”? We will experience candlelight services of years’ past. We will also be absorbed by the present and we will hope for the future. We will experience yesterday, today, and tomorrow, at once, together (*All I Really Want*, December 10, p. 48)

¹ I did not preach that which is within the brackets. This is the actual quote from the Kairos Document from which I derived and adapted the definition I offered above.

The Kairos Document: Challenge to the Church, A Theological Comment on the Political Crisis in South Africa, Institute of Contextual Theology, 1986, p. 33.

The author of *All I Really Want*, Quinn Caldwell has a different, and perhaps more ‘sentimental’, rather than ‘judgmental’, perspective on the definition that I also use and adapt in this message.

It will be a time when we will even experience, or at least glimpse, the time when God's kingdom will come to fruition. The Alpha of Genesis and the Omega of God's redemption will be experienced simultaneously in the light of the Christ candle lit in the present.

When we light the candles and sing "Silent Night", let it be a time where God offers us an opportunity to live in God's time: *kairos*.

This is the Word of God, and it was presented to all of you, the people of God. And the people of God respond, "Amen!"