

The Rev. Brooks Cato

I don't know if it's the end of Daylight Savings Time or American politics or just weird sleep patterns, but for the past week or so, I've been waking up early every morning. I'm up and at 'em before the sun comes up, and my unnecessary alarm goes off somewhere between my second cup of coffee and my first glance at email. As sermon introductions go, this one's pretty mundane, I'll admit, but here's the thing. Most of the time, when I wake up before my alarm, it's a huge disappointment, like I've been trying to squeeze out that last precious drop of slumber when someone or something comes along and slaps it out of my hand. A text from a family member sent at 6:45 starts the day with a touch of resentment instead of fondness. A dog barking to protect us from the existential threat of a jogger on the other side of the street. Or even just the unseen circadian rhythm hiccupping a tad too early. Full disclosure: I will admit to a sense of accomplishment when I wake up a minute before the alarm goes off, like I got all there was to get out of that sleep without having to deal with the obnoxious sounds dragging me out of bed. But those days are rare. And this past week, sleeping all the way to the alarm has been rare, too. It's been a late-to-bed, early-to-rise kind of week. Rather, it's been an early-to-bed, early-to-wake kind of week, just accompanied by too many hours scrolling news sites and refreshing Google on either side of slumber. You would think that being so sleep-deprived, I'd be especially grumbly about waking up with or before the sun. But not these days.

See, this week, those quiet hours before 9:00 o'clock Eastern Time, they're about the only time I've had all week that I could escape the News. And believe me, it's not for lack of trying! I'd wake up and see that numbers hadn't really changed all that much, or if they had, no one'd reported them yet. And if they hadn't, well, no one'd reported that yet, either. One day this week, I felt like I'd chewed my fingernails down to the elbow waiting for 9:00 AM Pacific Time to roll around. To borrow a line, the human body wasn't designed to think this much about Nevada. So that hour or hours while the news stations replay the announcements they made an hour ago or the night before, that hour where the last most recent numbers I'd since memorized kept popping up on the screen, that hour of being awake long before I'd like to be, that hour has become a treasure. Having the TV on or phone in hand didn't do any good then. (Side bar: I don't suppose having the TV on or phone in hand really changed anything even while tallies were coming in, but knowing what was happening *felt* like it did.) So, in that quiet hour, the news went off. The phone sat to recharge, and so did I. My dogs are especially fond of this time, too, the time when I remembered that there are living beings in the house other than me and the made-up but clearly drained news anchors. A quick game of catch and a chase around the dining room table go a long way to keep all of our souls light. It's a good time to remember to eat something, too, or feed those pups. And if those tasks finish and the sun's still down or only barely pinking the sky, there's a little blue chair in the quietest room in the house that calls to me.

That chair, y'all, it's like rest incarnate with its wingback embrace and stuffing popping out of an armrest. I've dozed there, sure, I've written, I've nothing-ed, but maybe most importantly, I've waited. And I've cherished that time of waiting, because it's given my head a time to clear and my heart a time to heal. This week, I'm not mad at the time I have between sleep and the time to start getting ready for the day. It's a great gift, one filled with only the sounds of snoring dogs and the click of a baseboard heater. And it's a gift I wasn't prepared for.

I've been thinking a lot this week, sometimes in that blue chair, I've been thinking a lot this week about time. Things have sped by and crept along all year, but this week especially has brought time to mind. I expect things to happen predictably when it comes to time. I know how many seconds are in a minute, and thanks to a particularly catchy song, I know how many minutes are in a year, but our experience of those things varies from the reality of steady ticks and tocks. We call all that *chronos* in Christian theology. Put simply, *chronos* is

human time, both the strict, predictable measurement of the thing and the way we experience it. Chronos is steady, and while events may surprise us, time passes in that period totally constant, normal, maybe even boring. But there's another way of looking at time: *kairos*. Kairos is God's time, an unknown to us, completely unpredictable yet appointed point where God shows up. Kairos is wily, quiet, immensely surprising, and highly anticipated. That story of the Ten Bridesmaids is a story with kairos, God's time, right at the middle of it all. The ten wait for God to come, accompanied by that ever-longed-for Kingdom of Heaven. Some are ready for the wait, and some just aren't. How ready they are has no bearing on when God shows up, so it's best to be ready at all times, receptive and prepared and focused in the waiting. Sitting in that blue chair in the quietest room in my house, I don't know if I was actually ready. I don't know if I was receptive. I certainly wasn't prepared or focused. If anything, my default this week has been anxious and frustrated and maybe even a little disappointed. It's been hard for me to cherish that treasure of early, quiet hours because my head's been in the wrong place.

Now, I don't want to discount the importance of the politics of our country. Lord knows what happens affects us all, and lord knows, for some of us, our ability to live our lives as we long to has been on the line. This is all true. But it's also very much in the realm of chronos, human time. And it's so easy to be consumed by concerns about human time. But as Christians, God holds a greater claim on us than even that. At Morning Prayer Friday, Fr. Steve reminded us that at the height of his earthly popularity Jesus turns and sets his face on Jerusalem, the place where he will surely die, but also the place out of which we'll taste God's salvation. All week long, I've had my face set on Washington DC and Nevada and Arizona and a host of other places I never think about. I've had my face set on human things and on human time. And I've gotten things upside down 'cause I've paid less attention to Jesus turning towards his purpose and bridesmaids filling their lamps, and more to that seductive desire to know all there is to know about sharpies and paper ballots. Chronos, for the bulk of my waking hours, has shut down kairos...at least in my head. But something different happens in that quiet dawn light illuminating that raggedy blue chair. With the news and the phone and my head silent, chronos shuts down. And I can finally sit in the embrace of kairos, where the passage of time doesn't matter and a second of silence can heal as much as an hour. Where I set my face on Christ and whatever's blue or red doesn't ache anymore. Where my worries for the world pass from my heavy heart to God and all is turned over, and I don't have to worry about when or how a full resolution's gonna come. It will, but in it's own time. Maybe even in God's time.

One last thing, and it's something I've really been excited about this week. While we may wait for God's time or even in God's time with calm and hope, the Prophet Amos warns us that God's time can be a hard place. It reminds me of CS Lewis describing Aslan in [The Chronicles of Narnia](#): "Of course he isn't safe, but he is good. He's not a tame lion." God's time is a hard place for those who long for the Lord but haven't lived for the Lord. Because, in God's time, all wrongs will be made right and justice will roll down like waters. It's a hard time for those who've failed to uphold justice. Amos is saying, be careful what you wish for, or in our case, what you wait for. See, just because we long for God's time, for that coming Kingdom of God we've talked so much about lately, doesn't mean that we get to just sit on our hands and wait. Much as I love the comfort of my blue chair, that's not where the work of the Kingdom happens, rather, it's not the only place. Yes, my soul needs prayer and centering and anchoring in God. But also, our waiting requires preparation. Like bridesmaids saving up oil, we've got some work to do, work that we begin in our time and complete in God's. No matter what has happened with our country, we've still got work to do. No politician is worth setting your face on, no matter how much you like them (or dislike them less than the others). We set our face on Christ, and doing that means holding our politicians lightly.

Now, I don't want to make it sound like I don't care about what happens in this world. Y'all know me better than that. I also don't want y'all to think that wishing Nevada could count ballots as fast as they count cards is the same thing as waiting in God's sacred time. What I mean is, there are so many things we set our face on, so many things we're invested in that draw us deeper into this world and further from God. There is a way to be invested in both, but it's hard. It's hard because it means putting the promotion of the Kingdom of God above all else. It means proclaiming "Christ has died, Christ is risen, Christ will come again" in all we do. It means waiting and working with one goal in sight: lives lived glorifying God. We can't do it on our own, and we can't do it fully in our own time. But with God's help, and each other's, we can, in due time. We can in God's time.