**God…Your Timing Sucks!**

**Scriptures: Luke 4:1-13, 2 Kings 2: 1-13; Rev. G. Scott Turnbrook; Northwood United Church; July 17, 2016**

God…your timing sucks. Do you remember your first love? And do you remember the timing of how it all ended? I remember mine. Colleen was her name and we enjoyed a wonderful relationship, as much as two teenagers do. I remember that point when we were making the transition from being friends towards becoming girlfriend and boyfriend and she said “Are you sure about this? When people become more than friends…when they fall in love…it doesn’t always end well”. Colleen had much more insight into matters of the heart than I had yet to accumulate. Yet, we went along, and Colleen became my first love. Some time later, as teenage romances often come to an inevitable conclusion, I gained a deeper understanding into the pains and sadness of unrequited love. And frankly, her timing … sucked! In the journey of a person’s life, special people come and go; however, I didn’t much like Colleen’s timing. And I came to understand the sting suffered at the ending of a relationship. God…your timing sucks!

Timing can be everything can’t it? At a comedy club: a well-timed joke by a comedian brings laughter from the crowd. On the baseball stadium: a perfectly timed pitch strikes out a batter bringing victory to the cheering fans. And in our homes: a nicely timed visit with a special guest brings us joy. Indeed timing is everything. For it can bring laughter, it can bring victory and it can bring joy.

But sometimes…timing can, frankly … suck! When timing doesn’t go our way, it can be very frustrating, upsetting and disturbing. It’s interesting, in our culture, we have increasingly become obsessed with trying to control timing. We mount clocks on our walls; we place watches on our wrists, and we check the time regularly on our smartphones. We punch the timeclock when we arrive at work and we punch it when we leave. In a competitive marketplace, there is a growing obsession with people’s productivity. And we are increasingly comfortable to measure one’s value by how much they can get done in a given set of time. The Greek word for this understanding of time that is prevalent in our culture is “chronos time”. If you ever feel yourself angry or upset at how things are unfolding; angry at your inability to be in control of how things are proceeding (and who doesn’t?) ~ generally you are struggling with a mindset that lives in “chronos time”. To proclaim a statement like “God…your timing sucks!” is to name the kind of time that you live in.

While chronos time is the predominant understanding of time in our world today, there is another view of time. The other perspective of time is called “Kairos time”. This perspective contrasts with chronos time because where chronos time is us seeking to monitor, control and change the timing of certain things in our lives; Kairos time is a shift to acknowledging that we are working on a much larger timeline. Kairos time is acknowledging that we are working, not on our timeline, but rather on God’s timing. I had debated titling this reflection “chronos time vs. Kairos time”; however, I thought “God…your timing sucks!” was a little more to the point! And isn’t that the truth? Quite often, we don’t like God’s timing. Just when we get comfortable and things are going so well, quite often God comes along and says ‘time for a change’. “But God! Things were going so well! Everything was organized and the way I liked it” And now you come in with this change! God…your timing sucks!

As we turn to the scripture passages this morning, I want to begin with the Gospel lection found in Luke 4. There is some interesting interpretation that has been done with it from the perspective of Kairos time vs. chronos time. As most know, this passage is customarily read on the first Sunday of Lent as people enter into that 40 day penitential season. And it makes sense, for as we go through our Lenten time, we prepare ourselves for the new life and resurrection of Easter. Amidst our summer season, I wanted to dust this passage off for us to consider this morning because it is equally applicable for us here at Northwood in mid-July as we walk into the next phase of leadership and communal life. It is intriguing to consider this passage from the perspective of time as the dialogue between Jesus and the devil is essentially a debate between giving allegiance to the devil’s chronos time versus giving it to God’s Kairos time. Jesus is given three temptations to fall into the devil’s trap of chronos time seeking to take him away from following God’s Kairos time. Firstly, Jesus is tempted by being given power now ~ in the present. He is hungry, and the devil tempts him saying: “Command these stones to become a loaf of bread” ~ one does not live by bread alone ~ counters Jesus. Jesus passes the first chronos time test. After being tempted by power, next he is tempted with authority. Showing Jesus all the kingdoms of the world, the devil says “to you I will give their glory and all this authority” ~ worship the Lord and serve only God ~ counters Jesus. Jesus passes the second chronos time test. And after being tempted by power, and then authority, Jesus is lastly tempted with invincibility. Taking him on the pinnacle of the temple, the devil says “throw yourself down and the angels will protect you so that you will not dash your foot against a stone” ~ Do not put the Lord your God to the test ~ counters Jesus. And so Jesus passes the third chronos time test.

Those were challenging tests, weren’t they? What would you do if you were in Jesus’ sandals? Let’s be honest: Don’t we generally like things to go our way? Don’t we like to feel in control? Don’t we like to generally have things on our terms and conditions? It is hard when things don’t seem to be going in the direction that we feel they should. It is hard when things aren’t coming along at our pace and timing. It is hard to have faith; to be our best self each day; to do our best; and trust that things will one day come together in God’s time. This is the chronos / Kairos time challenge. And while we certainly feel this at a time of the ending of a pastoral relationship as we said goodbye to Rev. Will, we know that this is a part of faith and living the Christian life. We have these feelings all the time. I suspect that many of you will recall some of the feelings that accompanied the 1998 amalgamation that created Northwood United Church. Sitting here almost 20 years later, things might seem wonderful. Yet the timing and decisions to close the two congregations located in North Surrey and Fleetwood to allow for the birth of Northwood must have been profoundly difficult. There is always the ‘not now/ not yet’, ‘let’s put this off’ ~ voice. There is always the ‘NIMBY’ principle ~ ‘why don’t you close and come over here?’ Yet that was the call: to start fresh. And the call was faithfully answered and Northwood was born in 1998. Life is full of changes, isn’t it? 2500 years ago, Heraclitus of Ephesus taught that “the only constant in life is change” and we have been struggling to live with that reality ever since. The struggle (and it is a real faith struggle, like Jesus’ temptation) is to find a way to faithfully live in tune with God’s timing and to have faith knowing that all things will come in God’s time.

And that brings us to our second scripture reading from 2 Kings. This passage records the passing of the leadership of one of the great prophets ~ Elijah, onto his successor ~ Elisha. Now before you extrapolate too much into this passage as simply being one of a passing of the leadership from Rev. Will to me for the next few months, I would suggest that this passage equally applies to all of us. It applies to the leadership that we are ALL called to offer via our God-given spiritual gifts. Certainly I will be offering leadership as your Supply Minister; however, ALL of us have been endowed with spiritual gifts and collectively we make up the church. The best ministers, in my humble view, offer a portion of their leadership in the form of ‘coaching’ and helping empower people to identify and utilize their gifts as an expression of their church. As I consider where we find ourselves today, what I particularly liked about this passage was Elisha’s uncertainty. Elisha wanted to stay on chronos time. He wasn’t ready; he couldn’t yet trust in God’s Kairos time. Frankly, I don’t think he would have EVER been ready to receive the mantle of leadership. It was being discussed all the way back in the 1 book of Kings in the 19th chapter when Elijah first threw the mantle to him. Chapters and chapters unfold before we come to this passage and Elisha still is not ready. Elisha even bargains with Elijah. Ok, I’ll take on the mantle of leadership but if I take this on I want to inherit a “double share” of your Spirit. Yet in God’s plan/ in God’s Kairos time, Elisha would take on the mantle and would continue to speak God’s truth to the Kings as they ruled over the children of Israel. Elisha would eventually come live in God’s Kairos time. God…your timing sucks? Perhaps God’s timing doesn’t suck after all?

I want to close our reflection time with an illustration for us to consider. Perhaps it is this ‘autumn-like’ weather we are having in the Lower Mainland that made me think of this, but I found my thoughts moving toward the flying patterns of the Canadian geese. As we are reminded from the image on the screen and on the bulletin, the geese fly in a ‘v-pattern’ with one lead goose at the centre of the v. Physics tell us that the hardest working flyer is the lead goose at the centre because she faces the largest amount of wind resistance. Inevitably the lead goose gets tired, and when that happens, she shifts her place in the system and moves further back along the wing; partly to rest and partly in order for a new lead goose to emerge. But the system is more involved than just the lead goose. In fact, the entire v-formation supports the efficiency of the larger system. Flying as they do, all the members of the flock create an upward air current for one another. With each flap of the wings, there is an uplift given to the bird who immediately follows in the v. As I mentioned earlier Rev. Will is a trusted friend and colleague. I was at Northwood when you hosted that wonderful farewell for him. I’m recalling a powerful moment that occurred when Deborah Richards, your board chair, read her letter of reference for Will. And as she was offering such a glowing recommendation to Highlands, I started to wonder…What if…over the past 7.5 years at Northwood, you have been not only just receiving great leadership from Rev. Will, but what if you were also preparing Will to offer a new specialized leadership at Highlands as they find themselves in their time of need? And what if…someone has been perfectly prepared for you as you move ahead in your unique context? What if right here, right now, this is an example of God’s Kairos time at play?

I would suggest, as we consider where we find ourselves today, that we find ourselves stuck in that frustrating tension between wanting to be in chronos time, yet knowing that we must move ahead and trust in God’s Kairos time. And so, let us be ever mindful and sensitive, and indeed let us continue to celebrate the past ~ the great heritage of Northwood. But let us also bravely consider the future into which God calls us to live and move and have our being.

God…your timing sucks? Actually, if we pay careful attention, God’s timing is usually spot on.

May we have the faith to see that truth! Amen