



The Time In Which We Live

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Rachel Yates

“Calls come at the least opportune time,” she reflected. Ellen Smith, Regional Liaison for Eastern Europe, was packing for a return trip to the United States when the phone rang. Upon answering it, she received an invitation to visit Davydovo, a Russian village. Though the timing was wholly inconvenient, she made the trip, and her ministry was profoundly expanded. There she met with the Orthodox priest Father Vladimir, who had begun a ministry for special needs children and their families.

His story, too, involves an unexpected phone call. While restoring the Orthodox church building in this tiny village, Father Vladimir received a call from Moscow, asking whether he could provide space and volunteers for a retreat for families with special needs children. Often such children are isolated from Russian society or abused when in public; parents do not find welcome in church because their children can be seen as disruptive. Though this type of ministry was not in his plans, Father Vladimir acted on the invitation.

Ellen Smith shared these stories at the recent Presbyterian Women Spring Gathering, with women from across the Synod of Lakes & Prairies. Today, the ministry in Davydovo has grown from an idea in a phone call to multi-week camps and a Permanent Accompanied Residency program to help children with disabilities transition into community and to live independently from their parents, but with accompaniment. A substantial donation from Presbyterian Women has helped to fund necessary infrastructure in the village.

The calls came at inopportune times for Ellen Smith and Father Vladimir. They both had other plans and deadlines to meet. I was reminded at the Common Ground Spring Assembly between types of time. We often think of time chronologically (“*chronos*” in the Greek). We schedule and plan our days and activities. We measure the pandemic in terms of months. We celebrate birthdays and holidays based on the calendar.

God’s time, however, is different. “*Kairos*” time is a space of opportunity and ripeness for action or decision. We read in the gospels of the need to recognize God’s time and the risks if we don’t. (E.g., Luke 19:44). God’s calls (whether by telephone, text, or prayer) rarely come at opportune times measured by the clock. Yet, they are perfect when measured by *kairos* time.

For now, we live in both times: *chronos* and *kairos*. The question is how well we balance them, and how well we recognize the latter. If I focus on completing my tight schedule, I might miss the opportunities for holy encounters that arise. It can be easier or more expedient to conclude we don’t have the time or the bandwidth to return that call or accept an invitation. Though we stay on schedule, the ripe space for action and decision is lost.

I offer my personal challenge to you as well: can we see the next Zoom meeting or conference call as not only the one-hour slot for which it is scheduled, but also as an infinite space of opportunity? While bound by chronological time, can we simultaneously experience God’s time? I pray for the blessings this will offer us all.

P.S. re What Is It?: Thanks to everyone who identified my mystery slats as curtain stretchers!