

The boss of a famous European furniture business once stood in the middle of a Chinese poultry market.

As he looked around – he saw he was surrounded by thousands upon thousands of plucked chickens.

“What happens to all the *feathers*?” – he wondered.

When – he was told that they were just thrown away – he realised he could use them for filling cushions.

So, *he* got a cheap source of raw materials – while the *poultry market* made a bit more money – thanks to his insight.

It was a moment of creative inspiration.

One of the great privileges of working in my diocesan role – is hearing the stories of how people – feel a vocation – into ordained ministry as priests.

In many ways, their experiences are all quite different. – But there’s one thing they all have in common – an unexpected and profound moment of *calling* –

Watching the sunrise early on Easter morning and being overwhelmed by a desire to share God’s love.

Or attending a friend’s Ordination – when a total stranger turns and says: “That’ll be you, one day.”

These are times of deep transformation.

In our Bible reading from the Book of Acts – Paul and his friends are travelling through – what is today – Turkey.

Their plan had been to travel west towards the Aegean coast and the Roman Province of Asia.

But – they’re prevented from doing so by the Holy Spirit.

So – instead – they try to enter the region of Bithynia – going north towards the Black Sea.

But – again – the Spirit stops them.

Finally – Paul has a vision of a man from the Greek Province of Macedonia – standing there – and pleading with him – and saying:

“Come over to Macedonia and help us.”

Inspired by this vision – that’s precisely what Paul does.

He travels to Macedonia –

where not only does he meet Lydia –

who responds to the Apostle’s message and ends up being baptised –

but where he also begins a fruitful ministry –

that will lead to the founding of some of the foremost churches – of the early years of Christianity.

What might have seemed like a *setback* – is in reality – a moment of remarkable opportunity.

Not many of us will have visited a Chinese poultry market – or been called by God into ordination – or travelled around the Mediterranean founding churches.

But we can still experience moments of –
creative inspiration –
deep transformation –
remarkable opportunity.

Greek – the language in which the New Testament is written – has two words for time. —
Chronos and *Kairos*.

First, there's *Chronos*.

This is the kind of time that ticks by –
minute by minute –
hour by hour –
day by day.

Then, there's *Kairos*.

These are the significant – momentous – and very probably *God-given* – instants of opportunity –
the turning points in time – when the possibility opens up –
that life might suddenly be – changed and transformed.

Our furniture manufacturer – our ordination candidates – and St Paul and his companions – all experienced *Kairos* moments.

But in our – high-speed – always-connected – 24/7 world – of instant communication –
and the constant pressure to fit more and more activity – into seemingly less and less time ...

It can be easy to focus so much on the *Chronos* –
the pressures of daily life –
that we miss the *Kairos*.

Time goes relentlessly by – and before we know it –
the clock hands have turned –
the day is over –
the week has gone –
another month has passed –
and the year is already rolling on towards the darker days of autumn and winter.

And – if we're not careful – in all the busyness and rush ...

We miss those divine *Kairos* moments of opportunity –
when God may want to do something amazing in our lives –
Inspiring and calling us –
Leading and guiding us –
Blessing us and drawing us more and more into his everlasting love and care.

Tick. Tick. Tick. — Goes *Chronos*.

And we miss the moments of *Kairos*.

So ...

How do we catch those *Kairos* moments?

How do we — like Saint Paul — know where God is — and *isn't* — leading us?

How can we be ready — to see — and to grasp —

those sudden and unexpected — exciting moments of —

Inspiration —

Transformation — and

Opportunity?

Well — first — we need to keep alert.

Keep alert to what's going on around us.

Keep alert — too — to what *God* is doing.

Throughout the Bible — and throughout the history of the Church — people have kept alert to the working of God.

Saint Paul was guided of the God's Spirit.

We don't know — *precisely* — how he heard the Spirit leading him —

But — however it was — he kept alert.

Or think of Moses.

When Moses was in the wilderness — looking after the flock of his father-in-law — Jethro —

He was alert enough — to go and investigate — an odd and peculiar sight ...

a bush that appeared to be burning with a blazing fire — and yet wasn't burnt up.

Then, there's Alban.

When Pagan Alban — on this very spot — met a priest by the name of Amphibalus — who was fleeing persecution for his faith —

Alban was alert enough to realise that this priest might have

a message of good news that was worth listening to —

despite the very real risks of offering hospitality to a passing Christian.

And we — too — if we want to be ready for those *Kairos* moments of opportunity — need to keep alert.

Often this means taking time —

not just to *pray* and to bring our concerns to God —

although prayer is good ...

but also, to *stay quiet* and listen carefully to God's still small voice.

God's voice that might come through ...

the sunrise —

a stranger's words —

a startling question – or
the Spirit's stirring within us.

So, we keep alert.

Why? ... Because God is here – with us – waiting to guide us – to lead us – to inspire us.

Then – second – we must learn to let go.

Let go of our plans.

Let go of our preconceptions.

Let go of the belief that *we* know best.

Throughout the Bible – and throughout the history of the Church – people have been bold enough – to let go of their plans and preconceptions.

Saint Paul could've stubbornly stuck to his plans for travelling to Asia or Bithynia.

He could've said:

“Look! We need to find a way – somehow – to get to these places.”

But – instead – he let go of his human plans –

and was ready to be guided by God – to the new and different destination – of Macedonia.

Then – of course – at the time of Jesus – some people – but in reality, *not all* – let go of their religious preconceptions.

Shepherds keeping watch over their flocks by night –

let go of the idea that God's glory was found only in the Temple.

The sick and suffering –

let go of their despair – and turned to Jesus in faith and hope.

A little group sorrowful women trudging to a tomb on that first Easter morning –

let go of their grief on encountering a figure who looked – really very much like the gardener.

And letting go has been the frequent pattern of those who've sought to renew the Church.

In the 1500s, William Tyndale – let go – of the idea that access to the Bible had to be strictly controlled by the Church –

and he challenged the view that services had to be conducted in Latin –

and – instead – he took the subversive step of publishing the Bible in English.

And we – too – if we want to be ready for those *Kairos* moments of opportunity – need to be willing to let go.

This may mean taking the uncomfortable step of questioning our own ideas ...

Is that *really* what God wants me to do with the next few years of my life – or might there be something better?

Is that *really* the only way to encounter God – or might I find God in new and surprising places?

Are people like that *really* so objectionable – or might they, too, be God's precious children, made in his image?

So, we keep alert.

And we let go.

Why? ... Because God is one step ahead of us –
 waiting for us with outstretched arms –
 ready to hold us and to bear us up.

So, having kept alert and let go – our third and final stage – is to step out.

Step out – into the new future that God has in store for us.

Step out in faith – into that moment of –
 creative inspiration –
 deep transformation –
 remarkable opportunity.

For St Paul – that meant stepping out into a future of fruitful ministry in Greece.

For Moses – the call was to step into the challenging future of leading the people of Israel to
 freedom in the Promised Land.

Alban – stepped boldly into a few-found faith.

For Wycliffe – it was the first step towards today's English Church.

For those discerning whether God is calling them –
 stepping out means being prepared to have their calling tested by the processes of
 the Church.

Tick. Tick. Tick. — Goes *Chronos*.

And – if we're not careful – we're in danger of missing those God-given *Kairos* moments. ...
 Moments of –
 creative inspiration –
 deep transformation –
 remarkable opportunity.

But ...

if we keep alert –
if we're willing to let go –
if we're prepared to step out –
 just as Saint Paul was ...
 then – we will find those
 rich and abundant –
 and probably unexpected –
 blessings prepared for us by God.

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