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## Third Sunday in Ordinary Time

[January 21, 2018](#)

John 3:1-5, 10

Psalms 25

1 Corinthians 7:29-31

Mark 1:14-20

A little more than a year ago, Thomas Friedman published the book *Thank You for Being Late: An Optimist's Guide to Thriving in the Age of Accelerations*. The book deals with the unprecedented pace of change our whole world is experiencing. Friedman says that humanity has known nothing like this since the days when Johannes Gutenberg invented his press, which put the Bible, and much more, in the hands of the public.

Today's change is happening because "the three largest forces on the planet — technology, globalization and climate change — are all accelerating at once."

Friedman quotes a friend who said, "When you press the pause button on a machine, it stops. But when you press the pause button on human beings, they start." The point is that in times of change like this, we need to take time to catch our breath, to understand what is happening in and around us so that we can be a purposeful part of it, not just riders on a bullet train headed to an unknown destination.

Friedman's ideas offer a contemporary complement to today's readings. In the first reading, we get the cartoon-like story of Jonah warning the people of the once-largest city in the world that they have 40 days to repent or be destroyed. Then, we hear Paul tell the Corinthians to live as if time were running out.

Finally, Mark tells us that Jesus began his preaching saying, "This is the time of fulfillment. The kingdom of God is at hand."

Today's Scriptures call us to take a good look at our times so we can make a Gospel-inspired response.

Jesus began his preaching after John the Baptist's arrest. Although it was obviously a time of danger, he interpreted it, as what was known in his day, as a time of *kairos*, the opportune time, a moment when God's activity on Earth was reaching a peak. Jesus summarized it all by saying, "The kingdom of God is at hand."

The concept of kingdom of God is elusive. Jesus talked about it in parables and analogies that described its great, contagious energy. Rather than being a place like a country or even a grouping like a church, it can be described as a new state of mind that engenders a new way of living. It grows through a web of relationships in which people experience loving union with one another and with God.

Jesus came, enthusiastically inviting people into that new way of life. He showed them what it looked like through his interactions with others. He taught his disciples to pray for its coming, and he himself prayed for it during the Last Supper saying, "May all be one, Father, as you are in me" (John 17:10). He knew that once people experienced it, they could never settle for less.



(Mark Bartholomew)

In order for us to be a part of that kingdom, Jesus called for repentance and belief. For Jesus, repentance referred to a thoroughgoing change of mentality and a commitment to the vision he was preaching. Unlike the king of Nineveh who demanded that the people fast and put on sackcloth and ashes, Jesus invited people to care for one another and feast together — on an ongoing basis.

The kingdom of God is just as near today as on that day when Jesus came to Galilee preaching about it. We are still called to repent and believe. The Second Vatican Council teaches us that in furthering Christ's mission we all share in "the duty of scrutinizing the signs of the times and of interpreting them in the light of the Gospel" (*Gaudium et Spes*, "The Church in the Modern World"). That means that we take Jesus' preaching and apply it to the world Friedman is talking about.

To read the signs of our times, we have to pause and contemplate our epoch. In "*Laudato Si'*, on Care for Our Common Home," Pope Francis calls us to "review those questions which are troubling us today and which we can no longer sweep under the carpet." He says that by doing this we "dare to turn what is happening in the world into our own personal suffering and thus discover what each of us can do about it."

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Peter, Andrew, James and John were called to leave their boats for the sake of the kingdom. If we wish to understand and implement Jesus' vision today, we must pause from our frenetic activity to contemplate our own reality, to cultivate what Francis calls "serene attentiveness" and gratitude to God. Only then will we be able to perceive how, as Francis says, the universe is unfolding in God.

This is our *kairos*, the only moment of history we have, and it is in our hands. Friedman says that our societies, our workplaces and geopolitics need to be reimagined. We have the formula; it's called the kingdom of God. We're called to be a purposeful part of it.

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**Editor's note:** This Sunday scripture commentary appears in full in NCR's sister publication Celebration, a worship and homiletic resource. Request a sample issue at [CelebrationPublications.org](http://CelebrationPublications.org).

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