

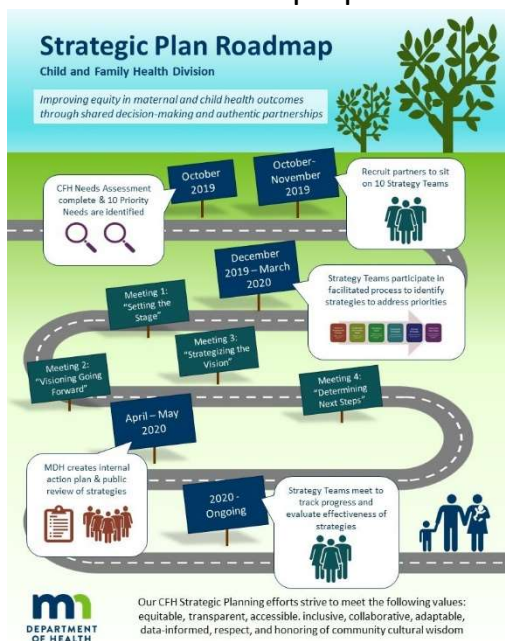
18 July 2021
Ephesians 1:3-14
God's Strategic Plan
First Mennonite Church

We are planners. We plan vacations, family gatherings, meals, our finances, what clothes we will wear, and even our funerals. Earlier in the week, I suggested to a couple of men that they should plan **not** to wear a suit and tie on Sunday as it would be too hot here in the sanctuary! I see they took my advice! You will notice that I didn't take my own advice as I'm wearing a tie.



Speaking of planning—this past week I planned out worship from now until the end of the year. Not in detail, mind you, but in broad strokes such as possible scripture readings, guest speakers, potential themes, and the Sundays that I will be off. I like to be prepared when the worship commission meets to plan

worship.



Any good plan will include a timeframe. When we plan, we try and imagine what our life will be like in 5, 10, or 20 years. Many have a financial plan as part of their retirement plan. Companies and organisations also imagine what things will be like in 1, 3 or 5 years. Many develop strategic plans which act like roadmaps into the future. These plans guide and provide organisations with the best route to take from today into the future.

All our plans have a timeframe. Maybe it's short, 1-year plan or a long, 15-20-year plan.

Our plans have a beginning and an end. The Greek work for this kind of time is **Chronos** time. The hourglass on our bulletin cover is Chronos time. It's where we

get the English word, chronology from. It refers to clock time, hour-glass time - time that can be measured - seconds, minutes, hours, years. Chronos time deals with things you can put on a timeline: People are born and they die, wars begin and end, worship services begin at 10:45 and end at 11:45. These are examples of Chronos time. Our strategic planning assumes Chronos time.



The author of Ephesians was excited to tell the church at Ephesus about God's strategic plan. Often, when we imagine God, we imagine God as a King, a shepherd, or as a father, or parent. Here in Ephesians 1, we are invited to imagine God as a planner.

After the greeting in 1:1-2, the writer launches into this long gushing, enthusiastic eulogy of God and God's sweeping plan for history and our place in God's plan. The verses Maryann read a short time ago, Ephesians 1:3-14, is one sentence in Greek! Yes, you heard me right. These 12 verses are one sentence. Lengthy cumbersome phrases, like God who has blessed us in Christ, destined us for adoption, redemption through Jesus' blood, forgiveness of our trespasses, are linked together with strings of synonyms and nouns qualified by overloaded adjectives, are all jammed together, fused into one long sentence that not only states many of the great themes of this letter, but also lays out God's strategic plan for all of history and creation.

My, that was a long sentence too!

Here's the thing: you can't really sense the writer's excitement in English because our translators—thank God for translators—took this long and dense, but enthusiastic and joyous sentence and added punctuation and verses—so that it's more readable and understandable. For example, the NRSV, the translation that Maryann read from, has separated this one sentence into 6. The RSV, I believe, is 4. The KJV of this passage reads like a gigantic run-on sentence! It managed to make it into 3.

As I prepared to share what I discovered about this passage this morning, I wondered how to communicate the excitement and enthusiasm of this long dense sentence. Reading it as one sentence is like a marathon runner who has just finished a race and phones her spouse to tell him about it. I thought of asking

Maryann to run into the sanctuary from the back, read the passage while she was a bit out of breath. But, how to get her out of the sanctuary so that she could run in probably would have raised questions of concern among you about why she left, so I shelved that idea. Instead, I asked her to read it as quickly and as enthusiastically as she could. I think she did a great job. So, if you wondered why the scripture reading was read so fast today, now you know!

Most of the time, I encourage people to slow their Bible reading down so that they can absorb the meaning of words and expressions, but the purpose of this long dense sentence is to overwhelm you, blow you away, leave you in awe at knowing God's strategic plan, God's plan for all of creation and history.

This one long dense sentence that is 12 verses long in Greek expresses the central conviction that an infinitely gracious God has blessed Jews and Gentiles alike in every conceivable way. God chose them/us, made us sons and daughters, and let us in on God's secret plan, that in and through Christ, God is gathering up all things, especially all people, into a divine unity (1:10).

God's strategic plans is laid out here in this one sentence. Ephesians 1:10 is centre piece of God's plan. It's the goal towards which God is taking all of creation and history. God set forth in Christ,

as a plan for the fullness of time, to gather up all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth (Ephesians 1:10).

If you have ever wondered what God does everyday, look no further than Ephesians 1:10. If you have ever heard preachers talk about wars and rumours of wars, earthquakes, and pestilences like Covid-19 being signs of the end-times, don't believe them. Read Ephesians 1:10, because here you have God's strategic plan for the fullness of time. God's plan for the fullness of time is to gather up all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth. God's plan is not to destroy, have this world blow up in a nuclear Armageddon while we escape this evil place and go up into heaven. No. God's plan is to unite all things, gather all things, and reconcile all things. **All things** is the Greek way of saying **everything**—people, water, animals, plants, insects, air, rocks—everything in the cosmos will be gathered up by God and restored to how God intended it at the dawn of creation.

When will this happen? At what time will God's strategic plan be completed? Before I answer this, let's first consider two noteworthy things about God's strategic plan.

First, God made the strategic plan and God will carry it out, bring it to completion. God will do it; not us. Christians gather in church on Sunday to praise and worship God, to try to live our lives righteously Monday through Saturday, not out of fear that God will punish us, not to gain more favour or merit with God, but because, in Christ, **we are already favoured**. We bless God here on Sunday morning in church in our songs and prayers, and we bless God on Monday morning at the office or whatever we do during the week with our deeds. We do this as our humble response to what God has already done, is doing, and will do. God has blessed us, chosen, adopted, redeemed, and forgiven us. We love God because God first loved us.

God created the heavens and earth, called Abraham and Sarah to be God's people, freed the Hebrew slaves from bondage in Egypt, sent the prophets to Israel to remind them of God's promises, and sent Jesus to show us God as a human being. While the death of Jesus on the cross seemed to affirm the ultimate power of evil and death, God raised Jesus from the dead. The resurrection, friends, is a concrete sign that God is in control of history. God's strategic plan is still active. God's plan to redeem, restore all things is still intact. In fact, it's already here in a partial way. The resurrection, we as a gathered community of faith, God working in and through us...these are all signs that God's plan is working. But God's plan hasn't been fully implemented yet. But it will come in the fullness of time.

Because the past, present, and future are in God's hands, our task is to live, as Ephesian 1:12 puts it, "*for the praise of God's glory*" (1:12). Take a moment right now to ponder your life—your family, friends, your gifts and abilities, health, finances--everything—as gifts of grace from God. All we can do with everything we have is to simply give thanks to God who has showered with countless blessings, and then to share our lives and blessings with others.

Second, while our strategic plans assume Chronos time, that is a beginning and an end, Ephesians' understanding of time is different. There are two different words for time in Greek. One is **Chronos time**, and the other is **Kairos time**. Ephesians says, *as a plan for the fullness of time*; the Greek word for time in verse 10 is NOT Chronos time, but **KAIROS time**. I've highlighted the Greek word for time in vs 10.

(Εἰς οἰκονομίαν τοῦ πληρώματος τῶν **καιρῶν** ἀνακεφαλαιώσασθαι τὰ πάντα ἐν τῷ Χριστῷ τὰ ἐπὶ τοῖς οὐρανοῖς καὶ τὰ ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς—Ephesians 1:10 in Greek)

Here I have a confession to make. When I was looking for a good bulletin cover picture, I couldn't find any photos of Kairos time, but it was quite easy to find one that represented Chronos time. An hourglass is classic Chronos time. I couldn't find a good Kairos time photo because Kairos time measures moments, not seconds or grains of sand flowing downward in an hourglass. Kairos refers to the right moment, the opportune moment. The perfect moment. Please forgive me for not accurately representing the meaning of time in Ephesians 1:10 on the bulletin cover.

When Jesus burst upon the scene in the Gospel of Mark to proclaim the Kingdom of God, Mark wrote: *'The **time** is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent and believe in the good news'* (Mark 1:15). The word for time here is Kairos. Kairos is a moment where we encounter God's presence and must respond. But, how will we respond? In Mark, the response was to repent and be transformed by the gospel.

In the gospel of Luke, Jesus is debating with the crowds about understanding the times and seasons. He said, *'When you see a cloud rising in the west, you immediately say, "It is going to rain"; and so it happens. And when you see the south wind blowing, you say, "There will be scorching heat"; and it happens. You hypocrites! You know how to interpret the appearance of earth and sky, but why do you not know how to interpret the present **time**?'* (Luke 12:54-56). Again, the word for time here is Kairos. Kairos is extraordinary time, requiring interpretation. Do we have the spiritual capacity and maturity to read the signs of the times, that is, where God is moving, so that we, God's people, can get into sync with that? This is Kairos time.



When Martin Luther nailed his 95 Theses on the Wittenberg door it was both a Chronos and Kairos moment. It was a Chronos moment in that it happened on October 31, 1517. But it was also a Kairos moment. You see, in 16th century Europe, Christians were frustrated, disappointed, and deeply anxious

about the church. Many wondered what the best way was to reform the Church. This inner turmoil prompted, motivated Luther to write those 95 Theses. A Kairos moment.

Old Abraham and Sarah leaving their homeland and embarking on a journey based on some promises was a Kairos moment. My spouse and I deciding to leave China after 16 years was also a Kairos moment. Both of us had this sense, an inner feeling, a desire that it was the right time to move back to Canada.

When will God's strategic plan be completed? What's the timeframe? It will take place in the **fullness of time**. Kairos time, not Chronos time. God's time, not our time. It's not for us to know. All we need to know is that the past, present, and future are in God's hands.

While it isn't important to know the time, we do know what God's strategic plan is, however. The central conviction is that the infinitely gracious God has blessed Jews and Gentiles alike in every conceivable way. God has chosen them, made them sons and daughters, and let them—and us—in on the secret, that in and through Christ, God will unite all things, gather all things, reconcile all things, and restore all things. Thanks be to God!