

## A KARIOS MOMENT AND COLLABORATIVE PARTNERSHIPS

David Kendall  
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I am very pleased to be here today and to have opportunity to share. I am convinced that in these times, Dickensian in nature (“the best and the worst”), we in the broader Wesleyan Movement have a kairos moment to seize if we will, and we must do so in collaboration as church and academy. Let me explain what I mean.

I’ve been urging our churches to join Paul and Jesus in praying for the church’s sanctification (see 1 Thess. 5:23 and John 17:17-19), praying that the church would be utterly God’s to do with as God pleases, to use however God chooses, and to participate in God’s ongoing mission to reclaim and renew the whole of creation. We’re way beyond church survival and even beyond church growth—we’re after the most comprehensive renovation of the whole of reality. Nothing short of all God plans will do, if we have anything to say about it.

Here’s the problem, however. Much of the church has been hijacked by the culture. This is not a new phenomenon nor is it a stroke of genius to observe it. It is a recurring problem. Predictably the cultures of this world have deconstructed the gospel, the good news of Jesus and His kingdom, and then put the gospel back together again in ways that fit or even enhance the culture.

For example, in our country people have harbored hopes of an American Dream—a vision of a kind of life that enjoys prosperity and peace. For many generations this dream has exercised enormous influence. So much so, that the gospel is often seen as a means to realizing this dream. To put it way too simply, the dream has deconstructed the good news and put it together again so that accepting Jesus represents a fast track to realizing the dream. Come to Jesus, join the church, be a good boy or girl, and God will bless you and the blessing will look like this dream-come-true.

When the culture stalls and the dream shatters, however (when a great recession comes, when terrorism that used to be over there comes to live here, when the gap between rich and poor that used to be so glaring over there now stares many of our people in the face on the wrong side of the divide, when we begin to think that maybe we *should* care about the environment which seems increasingly unstable, and when we can no longer deny the injustice of so few of us enjoying such a hugely disproportionate share of resources and opportunities, and the list goes on and on)—when the culture stalls the gospel that was tweaked to accommodate the assumed dreams of the culture no longer seems adequate. Followers of Jesus, on their way to the dream-come-true, suddenly realize that it’s not happening for them and nervously wonder

about where Jesus is taking them. There's a lot of this going on just now. Huge institutions once thought invulnerable now seem on shaky ground. The economy no longer seems a safe harbor. Many are wondering how life can continue or ever be good again, if things keep going on as they are. Hand wringing is common, sometimes even in the church.

But when God owns us as church, then the church is utterly at his disposal, and there is nothing to lose because it's all been surrendered for his use. When the good news of Jesus once again asserts itself against the bad news of our world, the good news deconstructs the culture, and helps us shape a life free of that culture's illusions and idolatries. When this happens life goes on but in ways fully compatible with the kingdom Jesus declared and demonstrated. If God were to foreclose on all our false hopes and assume sole proprietorship of the church, the good news would show us how to live even in a world that is passing away.

This is how it was when the church first came to be. Followers of Jesus showed their world that life did not require the gods venerated by their contemporaries. "The way it has always been" was shown to be a lie. In fact, it hadn't always been that way, and it could be another way that was better. And followers of Jesus were often in the lead showing that better way.

Last year I heard about a remarkable transformation that occurred in one of our FM Mission Districts. In the country of Peru mountain farmers stood up against the drug lords that owned most of the land around them. The drug Lords had convinced everyone that the land could only grow coca plants, from which cocaine was made. "It had always been that way, and it had to remain that way for the people to survive" they claimed. Of course this was a lie, but everyone believed the lie.

Everyone, that is, until a Christ-follower refused to use his land in that way and started to plant other crops. Now, everyone knows that the land will produce many crops, most of which can be eaten and directly benefit the village. Christ-followers exposed the lies that had kept people from possible blessing, and led them to a different and better life.

I believe that if the Christ-followers who are church courageously follow Christ in these days, we may dare to believe that once again lies about "the only way life can be good" will be exposed. We may dare to trust that if Christ has us wholly at his disposal, we may become agents of blessing and recreation to a world full of people who think everything is falling apart and there is no hope.

Since a lot of people in our part of the global mission field think this way, buy into the illusion that there is little hope, that things have so fallen apart that life can never be as good as it once was—it is a kairos moment for a people who will embrace the whole gospel with their all.

Some churches and educational institutions will seek to do this—will reframe their understanding and proclamation of the gospel in light of the current crisis because they desire to be a redemptive influence in the world.

I would humbly observe, however, that we can and must recognize and seize this kairos moment to embrace and embody the gospel of Jesus and his kingdom as the truly comprehensive good news addressing all that has gone wrong with God's world because this has been especially in our DNA since the beginning of our respective branches of the church.

We may have forgotten this or never really known it, but we now have opportunity to go back to our beginnings in order to go forward into a new century on mission with Jesus our Lord. We have opportunity to participate in Jesus' work to show how the world can be and demonstrate that this would be far better than anything that has yet been.

I want also to observe humbly that especially the larger community of churches that have been shaped by the dynamic of the Wesleyan tradition, in addition to those at the center of the American Holiness Tradition, is well poised to take advantage of this kairos moment.

We see the need to be more focused on the heart of the holiness message—perfect love, the mind that was in Christ Jesus, enjoying and expressing the fullness of God's Spirit in terms both of Christ-like character and powerful engagement in the work of Jesus which brings new creation everyone potentially and eventually everywhere at the last.

Having made such assertions to the church where I am privileged to serve and lead, I am convinced that we need in quite desperate ways collaborative partnership with the academies that share our tradition, for several reasons and in several ways.

The kairos moment requires careful and faithful thought and articulation. The academy specializes in both. Your institutions can help the church and especially its youth grasp better and more faithfully this good news, and see more vividly how it addresses the realities of our global, economically stressed, socially disparate, terror filled, war mongering, future threatened world.

The kairos moment will call for educating students for their vocation in this world, as agents of gospel driven life and service. Only our kind of institutions blatantly offer a truly vocational education—i.e., we believe that God calls all people into the ministry, that every endeavor and inquiry can be holy, that every arena must be flooded with light, showered with grace, and enticed by the Truth.

The kairos moment will be seen most clearly and addressed most effectively by emerging generations, as opposed to the rest of us. We can work hard to nurture and steward well the young people we have in order to awaken their curiosity, passions, and energies in God-ward ways. But they will need mentors in all fields of endeavor who can show them how to make a difference in all places by every legitimate means.

The kairos moment will require people who can see the better way the world can be—in whole and in part here and there—under the wise and gracious leadership of Jesus, and then can show what they see to students, young and not so young, whom God calls to make a difference (remember Holy means set apart or made different)—to establish a holy beachhead for the kingdom.

The kairos moment will require the church to do much better at making the case that a family's wisest investment for the future is to educate their children in order to participate in a world-transforming gospel mission.

The kairos moment will require the academy to become trustworthy stewards of the church's tradition as a context for welcoming and educating the church's children, not that they aren't, but they must be going forward.

The kairos moment will require that the church distinguish itself not only from the world, as the arena under the sway of the Evil one et al, but also from the reactionary, fear driven, ideologically-oriented generic Christianity or evangelicalism that popularly stands front and center in North America. I would like to believe that the church can accomplish this alone, but have come to believe we need help from the people whose business is thinking and reflecting, but whose lives are on the line with us in the actual practice of holy living and serving the world God so desperately loves.