

From Skip Masback, “Now is our Time” Sermon, November 13, 2011:

By 7:00 on the evening of June 18, 1815, the Duke of Wellington’s exhausted troops were on the brink of defeat. They had been fighting since 11:30 in the morning, ground down and pushed back by more than 12 charges by French cavalry and infantry. The Waterloo battle to stop Napoleon had now come down to this: a do or die last stand on a sodden ridge line.

At 7:30 p.m., Napoleon ordered his invincible Imperial Guard to deliver one final, crushing blow to the heart of Wellington’s line. French drums beat the Imperial Guard on towards his position, and Wellington ordered Major General Peregrine Maitland and his 1400 Foot Guards to take cover in the shelter of his ridge line.

As the French bore down on them, Wellington’s line braced for the attack, and Maitland’s Foot Guards remained hidden, lying prone in the wheat behind the ridge. Wellington waited as the French closed to within 50 yards, then 40 yards, then 30 yards before he finally turned to Maitland with the battle’s most fateful order: “Now, Maitland. Now’s your time.”

Suddenly, a wall of 1400 red coats loomed up before the French, firing into their ranks. As the French line staggered, Wellington ordered Maitland into a counter attack that drove Napoleon’s most fearsome troops reeling back down the hill.

It was one of the most consequential 15 minutes in world history, and it clearly turned on Wellington’s boldness, but it was boldness at the right time. Boldness at the right time is the key to greatness.

We all know how important boldness and timing can be. There’s an old story of two lawyer friends who were waiting in a teller line when armed robbers burst into the bank and lined the customers up against the wall to steal their cash. Suddenly, one lawyer felt his friend press something into his jacket pocket. “Psst! What’s that?” he whispered. “Psst!” his friend whispered back, “That’s the \$100 I owe you.” Boldness and timing.

You and I live in a “timing is everything” world. We live surrounded by devices that mark our time. But if you reflect for even a moment on your own life story, or on our larger story as a people, you’ll realize that, actually, the really

significant chapters of our stories are not governed by the regularities of clock time or calendar time.

Our really significant chapters are governed by the mysteries of God time. Sometimes no matter what we do we can't make any headway for years on end; sometimes it seems that everything comes together in an instant and a path opens to the fulfillment of our hopes and dreams.

The Greeks called that moment when everything comes together, that opportune time that leads to fulfillment, a *kairos* moment. "Kairos" may be an unfamiliar Greek word, but almost all of us are familiar with the notion of "the right time" – "the opportune time."

Our Ecclesiastes reading reminds us that our "kairos" times are in God's hands: "a time to be born and a time to die; a time to plant, and a time to pluck up what is planted, [3:2] and so on.

Like Wellington, every military leader knows the key to victory is to strike boldly at "the right time." Every surgeon knows you must operate at "the opportune time." Every business person knows there is a right time to invest and a right time to sell off. Boldness at the right time, at the kairos moment, is the key to greatness.

There are kairos moments in the lives of individuals, of communities, and even of civilizations.