

How are your levels of patience? Have you ever grown out of the 'are we nearly there yet?' question? Well today we are looking at an altogether different waiting period: the one that the disciples had to endure between Jesus ascending into heaven, that we remembered on Thursday evening, and something that had been promised to them by Jesus, sometimes called the Advocate, sometimes the Spirit, but whatever it was called they didn't understand what it was.

Well, actually, we don't really know whether that statement is correct. There are many occasions in the gospels when the suggestion is that the disciples didn't understand at least some of Jesus' teaching, but our gospel reading this morning suggests that Jesus very much trusted those disciples to carry on his work, and that he prayed to his Father to ensure that the powers that he had would be passed on to his disciples. So perhaps they would have understood that help was coming, but they may not, quite reasonably, have understood how that would happen.

But this morning I want us to look at the first chapter of the Acts of the Apostles, and particularly the reading we heard earlier.

Before ascending to heaven, Jesus told the disciples not to leave Jerusalem, but to wait for the promise of the Father. "'This', he said, 'is what you have heard from me, for John baptised with water, but you will be baptised with the Holy Spirit not many days from now.'"

But what that actually meant was beyond them. They had to wait. But what an important period of waiting it was, so I have called this talk: [CLICK]

"The Waiting Room of God: Between Ascension and Pentecost"

There are few things in life we dislike more than waiting. Waiting in traffic. Waiting for results. Waiting for answers. Waiting for change, maybe. We live in a world that tells us: "Don't just stand there—do something!"

But in Acts 1, Jesus says the opposite: "Don't just do something—stand still... and wait." After the resurrection, Jesus appeared to His disciples for 40 days, teaching them about the kingdom of God, and then He ascended into heaven. But before He left, as I said, He gave them one very clear command: "Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the promise of the Father"

So the disciples entered a strange, I think probably rather scary, period:

- Jesus has gone
- He has told them what he expects them to do next
- But the power is not yet here

They are living in, an in-between period. We remember that as being in between Ascension and Pentecost.

And that reading from the Acts of the Apostles we heard earlier tells us a lot about periods of waiting, or particularly about this sort of season of waiting.

And what we discover is this: A waiting season is not wasted time—it is God's preparation time. And it is preparation time in 5 ways: [CLICK]

1. Waiting begins with obedience

Jesus did not say: "Go immediately and change the world." He said: "Wait." And that must have been difficult.

Think about it:

- They had just seen the risen Christ – that period of 40 days, and just a little diversion, here; how often does that number come up in the bible? It is one of those numbers that seems to be key. Throughout the bible 40 usually represents a period of testing or trial or preparation or transition leading to something new. Think of the examples:

The Flood – judgment and renewal – rain fell 40 days and 40 nights meaning: a period of judgment followed by a new beginning

Moses was on Mount Sinai for 40 days and nights and also spends 40 years in the wilderness preparing him to lead Israel and receive God's law

For Elijah, it was to do with Spiritual Renewal: he travelled for 40 days and nights to Horeb: a time of exhaustion, renewal, and encounter with God.

For Jonah in Nineveh – it was a time to repent: he disobeyed what God was calling him to do and was given 40 days to turn back - A window of grace for repentance before judgment.

And finally, of course, Jesus – first he fasts 40 days and nights in the wilderness in preparation for ministry, and now he appears to his disciples for 40 days after resurrection

So 40 is this huge number, and whenever we come across it, we should remember that it represents a time of testing, a time of preparation, a time of transformation, and that really sums up what is happening to the disciples.

They had received the greatest mission in history, and now... they were told to pause

And chapter 1 of Acts tells us, "They returned to Jerusalem..." and they did exactly what Jesus asked. Waiting on God is not inactivity—it is obedience. Sometimes the hardest command to obey is not "go" but "wait." Because waiting forces us to trust: In God's timing, in God's method and, in God's power. The disciples could have rushed ahead in their own strength. But if they had, they would have built something human—not Spirit-filled.

Where is God asking you me and to wait right now? Is there a decision we want clarity on? Is there a door that hasn't opened yet? Is there a calling that hasn't fully begun? So the first lesson of this passage is simple: Faithful waiting starts with obedience.

[CLICK] 2. Waiting is filled with prayer

What did they do while they waited? They didn't just sit idly. "They all joined together constantly in prayer" (Acts 1:14). Later in Acts 1 we are told that they gathered in the upper room—there were about 120 believers. I love that little bit of detail: I wonder who those 120 were?

And they prayed. Not once. Not occasionally. But continually.

Waiting in the Bible is active, not passive. They turned waiting into worship and prayer and dependence on God. And this is what transforms a period of waiting into a useful time:

Waiting + prayer = preparation

Notice something important: the disciples didn't try to manufacture the Spirit's arrival. They didn't strategise. They didn't rush ahead. They prayed. Because they understood something we often forget:

what only God can do must be waited for, not worked for. When we know what God wants us to do we can work towards it, and sometimes we might get that wrong. We might think we know what God wants us to do and then nothing happens, and then we need to try and decide whether it is because we didn't work hard enough for it, or whether we misunderstood God?

What do you do when you're waiting? Do you complain? Do you try to force outcomes? Or do you pray? The disciples show us that the right response to waiting is not anxiety—it is prayer.

[CLICK] 3. Waiting happens in community

Another really important detail for us today: they waited together. Who were waiting? The apostles, the women, Mary the mother of Jesus, Jesus' brothers (and that's interesting by itself as the last time we heard about the brothers they clearly were not followers of their big brother!) and then, by my reckoning there must have been about 80 other followers. All gathered in one place. And they were constantly devoting themselves to, what we have been talking about.

God never intended waiting to be done alone. He needs us to support each other. He needs us to work together. He needs all of us to work together. In this first chapter of Acts we have the Christian Church in one place, and it amounted to 120 people. Some people say the Christian church is struggling – but we have grown from 120 to, well some say to as many as 2 billion worldwide. I don't think we are doing too badly.

But remember this: when we wait alone, we lose perspective, we lose hope, we lose strength, but when we wait together, in community, as a Christian family, our faith is strengthened, our prayer is shared, and our hope is sustained. The early Church wasn't born as a great success story from day 1 but it was born in togetherness.

Whatever you are waiting for, whatever you are waiting for God to intervene in your life for, then a dangerous place to be is to be isolated. And we as a church need to recognise that. I think we need more small groups, we need more prayer gatherings, and as individuals perhaps we need more Christian friendships. But whatever that is that God is calling us as a church to do, I am waiting to find out.

But what I do know is that God doesn't call us to do any of those things that he calls us to do alone: God often forms His people together before He sends them out. When Jesus send his disciples out he never sent them alone.

[CLICK] 4. Waiting includes preparation

The disciples didn't just pray—they started to get themselves organised.

During this waiting period, Peter stood up and led this group. Do you remember right at the end of John's gospel we hear that Jesus met with Peter and told him to, 'Feed my Sheep'. And in Matthew 16:18 we hear Jesus saying, "And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church." This is Peter remembering this and doing what Jesus has said.

During this waiting period scripture was reflected on. They didn't just wait, but they studied the scriptures as Jesus himself would have done. And then Judas Iscariot was replaced as one of the 12 disciples with Matthias.

Why does this preparation matter? Because it shows that waiting is not about doing nothing—it is about doing the right things. They couldn't bring the Spirit. But they could order their community, they could

make sure that when the time came what they did was aligned with Scripture, and they could prepare for what God would do.

Waiting is where we get ready for what's next. This fits in with the biblical pattern we discussed earlier: 40 days of Jesus' teaching after his resurrection leads the disciples to this time of preparation. This waiting period leads the disciples to ensure that they are aligned with God's teaching, and that all leads to Pentecost, which is the time of their empowerment.

If we as a church are waiting, what can we do while we wait? We can grow in Scripture. We can deepen our prayer life. we can strengthen relationships. We can deal with unfinished business.

What we must not do is to waste the waiting — we should use it.

[CLICK] 5. And finally waiting leads to power. This is the turning point. After this season of waiting, something happens: Pentecost comes. But we will talk about that one next week.

To finish, let's come back to where we started: we don't like waiting. We think waiting is delay, a waste, and frustration, but the Bible says: waiting is forming us for what God is about to do.

The disciples' waiting was only about 10 days, but it changed history. Because in that waiting: they obeyed, they prayed, they stayed together, and they prepared. And then, and only then, God moved.