

Acts 1.6-14

6 So when they had come together, they asked him, 'Lord, is this the time when you will restore the kingdom to Israel?' ⁷He replied, 'It is not for you to know the times or periods that the Father has set by his own authority. ⁸But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.' ⁹When he had said this, as they were watching, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight. ¹⁰While he was going and they were gazing up towards heaven, suddenly two men in white robes stood by them. ¹¹They said, 'Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking up towards heaven? This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven.'

12 Then they returned to Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is near Jerusalem, a sabbath day's journey away. ¹³When they had entered the city, they went to the room upstairs where they were staying, Peter, and John, and James, and Andrew, Philip and Thomas, Bartholomew and Matthew, James son of Alphaeus, and Simon the Zealot, and Judas son of James. ¹⁴All these were constantly devoting themselves to prayer, together with certain women, including Mary the mother of Jesus, as well as his brothers.

1 Peter 4.12-14; 5.6-11

Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal that is taking place among you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. ¹³But rejoice in so far as you are sharing Christ's sufferings, so that you may also be glad and shout for joy when his glory is revealed. ¹⁴If you are reviled for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the spirit of glory, which is the Spirit of God, is resting on you.

⁶Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, so that he may exalt you in due time. ⁷Cast all your anxiety on him, because he cares for you. ⁸Discipline yourselves; keep alert. Like a roaring lion your adversary the devil prowls around, looking for someone to devour. ⁹Resist him, steadfast in your faith, for you know that your brothers and sisters throughout the world are undergoing the same kinds of suffering. ¹⁰And after you have suffered for a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, support, strengthen, and establish you. ¹¹To him be the power for ever and ever. Amen.

John 17.1-11

After Jesus had spoken these words, he looked up to heaven and said, 'Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son so that the Son may glorify you, ²since you have given him authority over all people, to give eternal life to all whom you have given him. ³And this is eternal life, that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent. ⁴I glorified you on earth by finishing the work that you gave me to do. ⁵So now, Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had in your presence before the world existed.

⁶'I have made your name known to those whom you gave me from the world. They were yours, and you gave them to me, and they have kept your word. ⁷Now they know that everything you have given me is from you; ⁸for the words that you gave to me I have given to them, and they have received them and know in truth that I came from you; and they have believed that you sent me. ⁹I am asking on their behalf; I am not asking on behalf of the world, but on behalf of those whom you gave me, because they are yours. ¹⁰All mine are yours, and yours are mine; and I have been glorified in them. ¹¹And now I am no longer in the world, but they are in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, protect them in your name that you have given me, so that they may be one, as we are one.

The Collect:

Risen, ascended Lord,
as we rejoice at your triumph,
fill your Church on earth with power and compassion,
that all who are estranged by sin
may find forgiveness and know your peace,
to the glory of God the Father. **Amen.**

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

As human beings, we are all a bit impatient. From trivial things like wanting dinner to come quickly, to waiting for birthdays, to wanting to know how political or topical stories will end. Just at the moment, we are all probably desperate for this pandemic to end, to know how the world gets out of this mess that we are in. This is absolutely natural, especially in the COVID era, when so much is uncertain and frightening. So we often want to hurry time along a bit, or we want to know what the future holds for us, our families, our country. There's rather a lovely story about a little girl, sitting with her mother and father in church. The preacher is preaching, and as we preachers tend to do – rather going on. And on. The little girl is very patient to start with, but then she starts to fidget a bit, and get impatient. Then she leans to her mother and says - "Mummy, if we give him the money now, will he let us go?"



(John Singleton Copley)

And in today's readings from Acts we hear the disciples being a bit impatient, too. The first two verses of today's reading from Acts say: "So when they had come together, [the disciples] asked [Jesus], 'Lord, is this the time when you will restore the kingdom to Israel?' ⁷He replied, 'It is not for you to know the times or periods that the Father has set by his own authority.'"

It is not for you to know the times or periods. This is a clear message to Jesus' listeners that God has a plan, there is a season for everything, and a time for every matter under heaven (Ecclesiastes 3:1); but we don't and can't know the plan, the seasons or the timings. It all happens in God's good time; our part in that is not to try and understand the workings of God's plan, but to wait for all things to be fulfilled in accordance with God's will. And not to be impatient, not to try to hurry time along, but just wait for the story to unfold.

And there is an illustration of that in today's readings. In the reading from Acts we hear that Jesus gathers his disciples for one last time on Mount Olivet; and is taken from them as he ascends to His Father, to sit at His right hand.



(Johann Koerbecke)

His final message to them is that they will receive power to be His witnesses in Jerusalem and to the ends of the earth: but Jesus doesn't say – in 10 days time you will receive power. Quite the opposite: nothing is said about time at all. So the disciples set off back to Jerusalem, to wait in that famous upper room, not knowing really what the future would hold, not knowing that the ecstatic joy of Pentecost was now just a few days away, when the message of Christ would begin to spread throughout the known world by their Spirit-filled witness.

Tempting as it is to try and anticipate God's plans, or to make what we *think* are God's plans come true by human actions and endeavours, the Christian life is actually often about waiting; waiting for God, waiting on God, waiting for the Spirit to move us and lead us, waiting for opportunities for witness and worship. In a sense, our whole world is in a long period of waiting, as it has been for almost 2000 years. We know that with Christ's life, death, resurrection and ascension the reign of God on earth has been inaugurated; but complete fulfilment will only come at the end of time, when God will make all things new (Revelation 21:5). It is, as some people say, a time when it is 'already and not yet'; and in the meantime, we wait.



But as with those first disciples in Jerusalem, this is not waiting in the sense of the English saying – ‘killing time’. This is not a time for being idle, of gazing into heaven waiting for something to happen. Instead we use the interim time in a way that is active, and continues to work for the Kingdom of God, bringing life to the world. As the Gospel reading said today: And this is eternal life, that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent. (John 17:3). This is our mission, to be witnesses, endlessly on a pilgrim journey of outreach and in-gathering.

Bishop Lesslie Newbiggin, Anglican Bishop and missionary, wrote these marvellous words:

“The Church is the pilgrim people of God. It is on the move – hastening to the ends of the earth to beseech all men to be reconciled to God, and hastening to the ends of time to meet its Lord who will gather all into one.”

So the waiting is active: and also we are not to worry or to be anxious about the future, about how long the wait will be, whether we will have the strength to bear it. “⁷Cast all your anxiety on him, because he cares for you,” says Peter. God will restore, support, strengthen, and establish us: so there is no reason to be anxious or worried about the future.

We know now that the Holy Spirit was sent to be our Helper, our Advocate, our Inspiration and our very Breath of Life;

We know, as the reading from John 17 told us, that Jesus prayed, on his last night before his death on the cross, that the Father would protect us. “Holy Father, protect them in your name that you have given me, v so that they may be one, as we are one.” (John 17:11)



(Hans von Kulmbach)

So Jesus is praying for us, the Father is protecting us, and the Holy Spirit is supporting us. Then however long the waiting might be, however much we suffer fiery ordeals, however weak we may feel, however worried about our future, our families and friends, the mission we have been sent on will not fail. It will not fail because it is not **our** mission, it is God who is sending us to be God's pilgrim people. And at the end of the journey, we will meet our Lord, as He gathers us all into one in His glory. Amen