

Sermon 24.5.20 Encouragement in times of waiting By Joy Dipple

Easter 7 Acts 1:6-14 John 17:1-11

Times of waiting can be productive. In waiting we learn patience and have time for reflection and re-evaluation about the important things of life. That has certainly been the case in our present time of waiting – waiting for a vaccine to be produced against Covid-19, and waiting for a semblance of normality to resume. The waiting time has been more difficult for some than others, but it has helped all of us to re-evaluate our priorities.

Between the Crucifixion and the Resurrection there was a time of waiting, and now there is a time of waiting again between biblical events. On Thursday we had the Feast of the Ascension, and next week we shall be celebrating Pentecost, the coming of the Holy Spirit.

The disciples, and the women who also followed Christ, spent their time in prayer, waiting for the next event that would herald the beginning of the early church. They prayed. Jesus had taught his people to pray in the words of the Lord's Prayer, and in today's Gospel reading we hear how Jesus himself prayed to His (and our) Father.

We are experiencing a time when we perhaps need a great deal of encouragement, and there are three points of encouragement that I would like to share with you as fellow Christians, following my own reflections on today's passages.

Firstly, we have reason to be CONFIDENT because of our relationship with Jesus. I often don't feel confident, and can recall times when I have perhaps hindered, rather than helped, the spread of the Gospel. But in Jesus's own prayer I realized that He actually had confidence in us. He had returned to His Father in heaven knowing that He had accomplished all that His Father had required of Him. He had taught his followers about the one true God and how eternal life would be theirs through faith in Him. He really believed that his teaching would not cease, but be spread to the ends of the earth. He had confidence we would not fail in that task.

Secondly, we can be encouraged by the fact that WE ARE NOT ALONE. The Holy Spirit assists us in our task of spreading the Gospel. The disciples were in that time of waiting for God to dwell with them again, but more about that next week!

Thirdly, we can be encouraged because Jesus prayed for his disciples and HE STILL PRAYS FOR US NOW. Throughout the generations that prayer has remained constant. In Hebrews chapter 7 verse 25 we are told that Jesus 'is able to save completely those who come to God through Him, because He always lives to intercede for them'.

In the Gospel reading we hear Jesus praying for our protection through the power of His name, and also for our unity. Different denominations may have different ideas on how we express our faith, but our common unity is belief in the one whose sacrifice has brought us eternal life. We are also under God's protection. That may not mean exemption from the suffering that is in the world, but we can receive strength and endurance in knowing that the one who governs the earth, and indeed the whole world, is alongside us every step of the way. We often rely on the prayers of others, and pray for others ourselves, but how wonderful to know that Jesus Himself is praying for us!

Therefore be encouraged. In Christ we have confidence. We are not alone, and the Lord Himself is constantly interceding for us. Hallelujah!