

2017-05-28 Sue Diggory
Easter 7: Sunday After Ascension
Taking time to wait on God
Acts 1 1 – 11 and Luke 24 44 – end

How patient are you when it comes to waiting?

As a nation, we are known as those who are willing to form an orderly queue, to wait patiently in line and then to take our turn – does this sum you up I wonder, or do you seethe under a calm and quiet exterior believing that waiting is simply a waste of time, a time when you should be getting on with whatever is it you are queueing up and waiting to do?

In our Gospel reading today, the set reading for Ascension Day the disciples were being told to stay and to wait, *'[to] stay here in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high.'*

We know the waiting would only be for 10 days, but at the time they had no idea, they simply had to stay and wait, but what I want us to focus on today is what they did as they waited for the promised coming of the Holy Spirit. Luke tells us that after they had watched Jesus *'carried up into heaven'* they *'worshipped him, and returned to Jerusalem with great joy; and they were continually in the Temple blessing God.'*

The disciples used their time of waiting as a time of praying, as a time of waiting on God and seeking to bring him blessing; they used their waiting as a time to be in God's presence as much as they could; the question we must ask ourselves today is are we prepared to follow their example as we wait, are we prepared to use the time between now and Pentecost as a time of positive waiting, as a time to bring blessing to God.

They were told to wait in Jerusalem, we can't do that. They were told to stay in the Temple, we can't do that either, but what we can do is PRAY as we symbolically wait for Pentecost to come once again.

Having spent the last week in Galilee on retreat, and I will bore you I'm sure over the coming weeks and months with tales of 'when I was in Galilee' I have found it easy to understand why time and time again Jesus often withdrew to a quiet place to pray, why he sought to escape the crowds and take time just to 'be' with his Father.

Earlier in his Gospel in Luke tells us that after Jesus healed a man with leprosy in one of the Galilean towns and as news of this spread throughout the area more and more people were coming to be healed. Luke goes on to say that Jesus often withdrew to lonely places and prayed; Jesus chose to take time and make time for prayer. Jesus knew that was what he needed to do, take time out to 'be' and listen to the voice of his Father, to take time to make sure he was 'doing the will of the one who sent him.' I suggest that if Jesus knew he needed to take time out to pray how much more do we need to do the same.

Well I suspect you may be thinking that was simple for Jesus to do as he wasn't juggling the pressure of life in the 21st century, and of course easy for Sue as she hasn't had anything else to do for the past week! Well I admit to having had the joy of having both the time and space to pray, not always in a 'lonely place' but certainly in a place that may well have been a place that Jesus had really been and I suppose that does make it a little easier!

But, what about now, today and the coming week as life has returned to normal, how easy will it be for me, how easy will it be for us to make the time and space to set aside quality time to be like the disciples and be blessing God with our prayers. My guess is that if we really want to find the time we will!

From last Thursday, Ascension Day the church has been invited by our Archbishops Justine and John to be involved in the Thy Kingdom Come prayer initiative, the great wave of prayer that is currently taking place across our nation and throughout many countries across the globe. We are being called in this waiting time until Pentecost to involve ourselves both as individuals and as a church community. If you google Thy Kingdom Come, there is a raft of helpful information to aid both public and private prayer.

Yesterday we met for prayer over breakfast at the Vicarage and focused on prayers of 'thanks' – the theme for the day as well as of course bringing before God the tragedy of the terror attack in Manchester on Monday, something you may want to light a candle for later in the service and the attack on Coptic Christians once again in Egypt on Friday.

This Wednesday the 6 local ECC churches will be hosting an afternoon and evening of prayer in Edenbridge Parish Church with a series of prayer stations as part of Thy Kingdom Come covering topics such as health and healthcare, housing and the homeless, education, youth and children, friends and family and of course the election. Come when you can and go when you must is what we are asking, come at any time between 2 and 4 in the afternoon or 7 and 9 in the evening; a great opportunity to just 'be' and to spend some time prayerfully waiting for Pentecost.

I suspect you may be sitting and thinking all this 'prayer stuff' is OK for Sue, she's a vicar and prayer is what vicars do, it's easy for them, but not for us – how wrong you would be, prayer is not easy and it takes time, but it need not be complicated and definitely does not have to be done in a certain way using long and holy sounding words. Prayer can of course use words but it can also be silent, and we all need to remember that we are called to pray as we can and not as we can't, we need to remember that it is OK to be an individual!

As well as having the joy of spending the last week staying on the shores of Galilee with a group of like-minded retreatants we also had the great joy of being led by Bishop John Pritchard the ex-bishop of Oxford, speaking to us not only about the places we visited but about prayer and ways to do it!

John encouraged us to think about prayer not as a way of getting God to do things but as a way of us developing a relationship with our Father as we bring to him both the things that make us glad as well as the things that make us sad, the things we long for and the things

we would rather forget, the things we are concerned about along with things we simply wonder about.

I found it helpful when Bishop John referred to prayer as simply stretching out these things that we instinctively think about in the direction of God, remembering that as we do so we are building our relationship and friendship with him.

Can I encourage you this week as we are reeling from the terror attack in Manchester to stretch out your feelings towards God?

Can I encourage you to come along to the parish church on Wednesday and along with our brothers and sisters in Christ from all the local churches to stretch out your concerns for the topics we will be seeking to address towards God?

And lastly can I encourage you as an individual to be part of the Thy Kingdom Come initiative to pray daily for 5 people, family, friends or acquaintances to either come to know Christ or to know him better, as you stretch out your thanks for them and your concerns for them to grow in their relationship and friendship with him?

Finding time to pray in Galilee was easy, but now I'm back to the reality of life here in Crockham Hill, so my challenge to me is just the same as my challenge to, to make time as we wait for Pentecost to come to be like the early disciples, and to use this time between Ascension and Pentecost as a time to 'stay and pray.' Gregory of Nysa, one of the early church fathers from Cappadocia said "The most important thing is to become a friend of God.'

Let's all use this week as a week to find time, to find time and space to pray, and in doing so to develop our friendship with God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit as we wait for Pentecost and join in the great wave of prayer that seeks to help Thy Kingdom to come more fully in us, our community, our nation and our world, as we seek to be a blessing to God.

Amen.