

Rev Tim Perkins
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“Jesus gave them this command, ‘Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about. For John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.’” Acts 1: 4-5

Dear Friends,

And the waiting goes on! Waiting can be such a frustrating experience, can't it? Usually, that is because we view it as an interruption to our busy schedule but I guess most of us don't have that excuse at the moment! I suspect that many of us are finding our experience of waiting even more frustrating than normal because we are perhaps struggling to find things to do while we wait for some sense of normality to return.

In my household, we have four completely different experiences of life being lived at this moment. I am working as normal but not in any sort of normal way! My wife, Lyndsey, has been furloughed from her work so she is getting paid for doing nothing. She is a people person and is struggling a little with the boredom of not being able to get out and about. Isaac is back at school after the Easter break but his school is now located at the desk in his bedroom. He seems to be doing all his work in a third of the time it would take if he were actually at school! He is waiting for the opportunity to be with his friends again. Nat, I guess, is in the most difficult situation. He was due to do his A levels this summer. He has finished all of his necessary work and has accepted an offer for University. But he literally has nothing that needs to be done. Thankfully, he is finding some creative ways to keep himself occupied. Four different experiences of waiting. I am sure you can imagine some of the dynamics of experiencing that waiting together as a family!

Waiting is a key theme in Christian spirituality and spiritual waiting always leads to a new understanding of how God is at work or a new pouring out of the love and power of God through the ministry of the Holy Spirit. I wonder, then, if God is calling us to use this time as a period of spiritual waiting, prayer and reflection? Last week, I wrote about the importance of listening in developing our relationship with God and coming to a clearer understanding of God's call upon our lives. I have recently completed a professional volunteer listening training course and one of the learning points from that is that you can never listen to anyone in a hurry. Listening takes time, it requires focussed attention. It is exactly the same in our relationship with God as it is in all our other relationships. Our listening to God cannot be done without the experience of waiting upon God.

Our quotation from the Book of Acts above, reminds us that the disciples were commanded by Jesus to wait. I wonder why? At least one answer to that is that we human beings have an inbuilt capacity in our relationship with God to run ahead. We are often impatient and sometimes think we know better than God. We have an idea of what God's work should

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look like and we want to get on with it and so sometimes do not actually bother to wait and consult with God to see if the said idea is indeed what God is calling us to focus on. That is a lesson that the somewhat impetuous Peter had to learn and keep learning repeatedly! So our waiting is, at least partly, about allowing God to be God and to work in God's own good time.

I am convinced that God will use these current times to reshape the Church if only we will wait and listen and subject ourselves to God's timing and God's guidance. I have been struck this week by some questions that our Chair of District, Rev Kerry Tankard, included in an email to all the Circuit Superintendents in the District. I want to share some of them with you:

- What spiritual hunger has been revealed by Covid-19 and how do we nurture that?
- How has pastoral ministry been rediscovered, and what might this mean for us in the future?
- What did we think was essential before Covid-19, that we have discovered was simply distraction?
- What have you learnt about your ministry because of Covid-19?
- How have you witnessed the deepening of discipleship during the pandemic and its enforced restrictions?

They are not question for us to jump to answer now. They are questions to ponder upon and to pray about as we continue to wait on God. And in our waiting, I urge you to make use of the spiritual practices that can enable that waiting to become a participative experience; practices such as prayer, studying Scripture, fasting, conferring with others (albeit remotely), silence, solitude, meditation, thanksgiving, generosity, service to those in need (safely!) and worship.

As we develop these practices in new ways, I believe we will come to discern God's hand at work amongst us and we will be strengthened in our faith.

I want to finish this letter with that most wonderful of visions that the Prophet Isaiah had, which occurs at the turning point of the book named after him. A passage written in a time of huge crisis for the people of God but one pointing them to a new understanding of God:

“Have you not known? Have you not heard? The Lord is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He does not faint or grow weary, his understanding is unsearchable. He gives power to the faint and strengthens the powerless. Even youths will faint and be weary, and the young will fall exhausted; but those who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength, they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint.” Isaiah 40: 28-31

With every blessing,

Rev Tim Perkins