

“Waiting” a sermon based on Acts 1:1-11 and Luke 24:44-53 preached at Knox Church Dunedin New Zealand by Kerry Enright on 24 May 2020

It can be accessed from the Knox Church YouTube Channel

<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCYksSjG0llf00NeogNIGs7A>

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Prayer - God of all, for the truth who sets us free, for the Christ whose future we can live, for the Spirit whose power gives life, we ask you to open our hearts and minds. In Christ.

Many years ago I took a course at Mt Eliza Business School on the Mornington Peninsula near Melbourne. For one part of the course we were divided into groups of 8 and each group was given a task with a limited time to perform it. The pressure was on. Our task was simple. A rope was tied about one and a half metres off the ground between two trees. Our task was to get our whole group over the rope without touching it. People approached the problem in different ways. The young vigorous males in the group knew exactly what was needed – they would lift everyone over the rope. Others doubted that approach because of our various shapes and sizes. So people started to talk about less physical options. There was a mix of attitudes – those who just wanted to get on with things because what was needed was very obvious – Just do it! Others wanted to consider alternatives. We were allowed to ask questions of clarification, so we did, and options gradually shrunk. After a while someone asked a simple question – could we lower the rope? Yes, we could. Well, the task suddenly became very easy. The exercise aimed to challenge our instinctive approaches and assumptions. There is a saying, to assume makes an ass of you and me.

The gospel story today comes after the story of two people walking to Emmaus and there recognising Jesus in the breaking of bread. They rushed back to tell the disciples. From what we know of the disciples, they were a mix of the just do its and the “hang on a minutes”. I imagine Peter was a just do it, and perhaps Andrew was a hang on. And I imagine there were others who said, just leave me alone with my own thoughts! To this mix of people Jesus says – “I am sending upon you what my Father promised; so stay here in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high.” Then in Acts we hear an echo of those words – “While staying with them, he ordered them not to leave Jerusalem but to wait there for the promise of the Father. You will be baptised with the Holy Spirit not many days from now.” The disciples knew this Jesus and they thought they knew

what he had promised, the restoration of Israel. Despite all the attempts of Jesus to turn them from imagining that future, they still held to it. It was obvious. “Jesus, just do it!” So yet again, Jesus challenged their view - “it isn’t for you to know”, he said. Put aside your imagined future. And then he promised more, “you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you and you will be my witnesses ... ”

Jesus was asking them to step back, to wait, to make space, to leave room for the Holy Spirit to come upon them. Perhaps God is doing the same thing now in our rest from physical gathering. Perhaps God is asking us to wait, to step back, to be reminded of who we are and what we are for, not assuming our future will be more of what we used to do. To step back, because sometimes we make the church primary and God and the purpose of God secondary. Because sometimes the power of the church limits our experience of the power of the Spirit. Because sometimes involvement in the church is promoted more than receiving the power of the Spirit.

These promises of Jesus are momentous, life-changing, life-giving. That the terrifyingly beautiful untameable God, the one who hovered over creation at the beginning, the one who animates our planet, the one who infuses creatures with life, the one who empowers people to love, the one who connects us in community, this beautiful and powerful Spirit will come upon us. This Ascension Sunday, Jesus invites us to wait for that Spirit. To wait. Now this promise may be outside our assumptions of how God works, or beyond our previous experience or not what we imagine the future to be. That was no less true for the disciples, yet, they waited and the power came. The power came.

And when the power came, the disciples became church. They worshipped and they witnessed. They witnessed to the life of Jesus, among people close to home and among people beyond all natural boundaries, even to the ends of the earth. To witness means to tell our story of how Jesus has encountered us, stories as diverse as we are, but pointing beyond us, and beyond the church, to the person of Jesus and his life in the world. This is our purpose. This is a waiting time, for the power of the Spirit to come anew. When the Spirit comes upon us, lives change, our purpose becomes clearer. And there is a new normal, as we worship and witness in the power of the Spirit, not the power of our heritage or reputation or anything in us.

So let us wait. The Spirit will come. Just wait. Prayer – Living God, you promise the power of your Spirit. And so we wait, for as long as we need to. Open our lives to your Spirit, we pray. In Christ. Amen.

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