

## Waiting for Pentecost

### Acts 1:9-26

Last week, we examined the wonderful truth that Christ has ascended into Heaven. Because of this, we rejoiced that Christ has all authority, not only in Heaven, but on the Earth as well. And just before His ascension, we read in Acts chapter 1 that He told His disciples to bear witness to Him to the very ends of the Earth. But before they were to go charging off to tell the world about Him, Jesus told them to wait in Jerusalem until they received the power to carry out their ministry, to wait until they had been baptized with the Holy Spirit.

Now, it turns out that their first inclination was to do just that – to wait. In verse 10, we learn that they kept on gazing upward, even after the clouds blocked Jesus from their view. Could it be that they thought He would only be gone a moment, and that He would return immediately to set up His Kingdom on Earth? Whatever the reason, it took a couple of angels to break their reverie, to send them on their way back to Jerusalem.

And we would like to stay on that hilltop too, wouldn't we? We Presbyterians love to hear about the absolute power of Christ, how He holds all authority in Heaven and on Earth. And so it's easy for us to stand with the disciples, gazing up into Heaven, waiting for Jesus to come back and do everything Himself, neglecting the work He has called us to do.

So, why didn't the angels let the disciples linger on the hilltop? Well, why can't we just wait for Jesus to come back and fix the big mess this world is in? Because of the reason Jesus told His disciples to wait: they were not to wait for Him to return – no, they were to wait for their preparation for ministry to be complete. In other words, they were to wait expectantly, not idly. They were to wait, but only so that they could go into ministry with greater effectiveness, empowered by the Holy Spirit.

So, how can we engage in such active, expectant waiting? Knowing that only God can pour out His Holy Spirit into the hearts of sinners, knowing that only Christ has the authority to forgive sinners and bring them to the Father, how can our waiting equip us to participate in this ministry of reconciliation? And what part can we possibly play as we wait for God? Let's take a look at how the disciples waited and see if we can't find a few clues.

The first thing we notice is the place where they waited. The angels told them not to stay on the Mount of Olives, but to go back into Jerusalem. And why is this important? Because Jerusalem was the place where Jesus had been crucified and thus the place where they would be surrounded by His enemies and theirs. In other words, God called the disciples to wait in the very place they found most dangerous and uncomfortable. And God calls us to do the same thing – to wait faithfully, trusting in His providential protection.

No, we may not be in imminent danger of crucifixion the way the disciples were. But the fact is that the people who most need to hear the gospel are often those with the most personal problems, those who are the hardest to get along with. Because of the sin in their lives, they tend to be hurting, unpleasant, even dangerous. They tend to be the sorts of people we generally avoid.

But it is no use waiting for God to send you to minister to the lost if at the same time you move far away from them and never have anything to do with them. After all, you can't preach to people if you aren't at least on speaking terms with them. You can't reach people for Christ if you never step outside your comfort zone. Maintaining proximity, remaining in relationship with genuinely hurting souls is simply a prerequisite for gospel ministry.

How else do we wait? If we must wait faithfully, we must also wait prayerfully. The Scripture says that all the disciples continued in prayer and supplication. Now, it was ten days between the day that Jesus was taken up into heaven and the day of Pentecost when the power of God fell upon them. But when they began their prayer meeting, they didn't know how long they would have to wait – for all they knew it could have been ten years.

At our recent Presbytery meeting, Pastor Scott Castleman told us that a group of ladies prayed faithfully every week for revival to break out at First Presbyterian Church in Ocean Springs – and they prayed for 40 years. Just so, Jesus' disciples knew that they should keep on praying, no matter how long it would take. And so they prayed until God gave them the power that they needed.

In the same way, it's not enough for us simply to maintain contact with the lost and hurting, even with those who may have hurt us, so that we might minister to them. We also need to pray for them, just as persistently as we pray for our sick and hurting family and friends. So, don't just hope that folks who need to know Christ or know Him better will show up in church one day. Put them on your prayer list, along with, yes, those who may have hurt you or your loved ones – don't they need Christ in their lives too?

But there's something else the disciples did to prepare themselves to be empowered for ministry. For if they waited faithfully and prayerfully, verse 14 also says that all of the eleven waited in one accord. That means that they were all of one mind. They were all determined to wait for God's answer to their prayers. They all agreed with one another, and so they stayed in Jerusalem together and so they prayed together.

Just so, nothing compromises the message of the church today more than disagreements among us Christians. And on the other hand, nothing is a greater testimony to the truth of the gospel than when we all agree. So as we maintain our contacts with lost and hurting people, and as we lift up our earnest prayers for them, before we can announce the message of God's reconciliation with the world through Christ, we must seek to reconcile ourselves one to another within the body of Christ.

But even this is not enough. We must not only be of one mind with one another. As we wait faithfully and prayerfully, we must also bring our minds and our actions into alignment with God's Will. No, we may not understand everything in the Scriptures, but we must put into the practice the things in it that are clear to us.

And this is exactly what the disciples did. Look, for example, at verse 16. They believed that the Scriptures went so far as to predict the way Judas had betrayed Jesus. And why? Peter clearly says that the Holy Spirit used David's mouth to speak the words that the Holy Spirit wanted him to say and wanted us to hear. Years later, Peter would express the same thought in his second epistle: "Holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit."

And the disciples would go on to make this belief in the divine authority of Scripture the touchstone of their ministry. For when Pentecost finally came ten days later, when the Holy Spirit was eventually poured out on the disciples and they began to preach, Peter's first sermon was based as much on the Old Testament Scriptures as it was on his personal experience as a follower of Jesus. Where it comes to column inches of text, almost 40% of that sermon is taken up with quotations from the Old Testament.

But it's not enough just to quote Scripture, is it? We also have to apply it to our personal lives, our day-to-day situations, if we want our witness to be believable. Ah, but how do we know which particular verses to apply to our particular situation?

Well, how did the disciples apply the Scriptures in today's passage? The first quote in verse 20 comes from Psalm 69. Now, Jesus' disciples knew this psalm was talking about Jesus. When He had driven the moneychangers out of the temple, they remembered that this psalm also says, "Zeal for Your house has eaten me up." Later, when Jesus was offered sour wine at His crucifixion, they saw the fulfillment of yet another verse of this psalm: "They also gave me gall for my food, and for my thirst they gave me vinegar to drink."

And so we see the miracle of Scripture – how David could write Psalm 69, describing his own experiences in poetic language, and yet at the same time, the Holy Spirit could speak through that same poetry in order to predict specific events in the life of Jesus 1000 years later. It's no wonder, then, that in today's passage, Peter applies yet another verse of psalm 69 to Judas, one of the persecutors of Jesus: "Let his dwelling place be desolate, and let no one live in it."

But there's another verse that Peter applies in verse 20 to Judas, the betrayer of Jesus. This verse comes from another psalm of David, psalm 109. In this psalm, David asks God to judge and punish someone, as he says, "because he did not remember to show mercy, but persecuted the poor and needy man." About this persecutor, David thus says, "Let his days be few, and let another take his office."

The application point is clear enough, and it's easily applied to Judas – one who persecutes innocent people should be replaced if he holds any sort of office or practices any sort of oversight. In fact, we would all recognize that this just makes sense – who wants a bully to have any sort of responsibility?

But here's the catch: whereas Psalm 69 on numerous occasions specifically refers to events in the life of Jesus, Psalm 109 doesn't. Yet Peter felt justified in using a verse of Psalm 109 to fill in the details about what should be done to one of the persecutors of Christ, persecutors whom Psalm 69 says should be accursed.

And this points the way to how we should use the Scriptures in our daily lives as well – drawing the general principles out of God's Word, and then applying them to our particular situations. And of course, in order to do that, we need to know God's Word very well, don't we?

So as we wait for God, let us wait faithfully, remaining in relationship with those who need Christ or who need more of Him. Let us pray expectantly for God to equip us for ministry and to pour out His Spirit on all those who need a closer relationship with Him. Let us seek reconciliation with those who have hurt us, especially with our brothers and sisters in Christ. And let us seek to know more of God's Word, and to put God's Word into practice in our daily lives, so that we can witness to Christ as much with our lives as with our lips.

And as we keep reaching out even to those with whom we disagree, and as we continue to pray for them, and as we can keep on loving other Christians in spite of our disagreements, and as we seek to live our lives more consistently according to the Word of God, aren't we, just by doing these things, demonstrating the character of Christ? Aren't we thus bearing witness to the reality of the Spirit of Christ within our lives? In fact, in order to wait in faithfulness and prayer and unity for the power of Christ, in order to know and to live according to the Scriptures, we need to be filled with the Spirit of Christ, don't we?

And so as we wait for Pentecost, as we wait for God's Spirit to be poured out on the lost, let's also pray that God to fill us with His Spirit anew and afresh every day. Let's pray that God would give us His Spirit that we might wait as He would have us to wait, and then go as He would have us to go.