

"Until ThenWe Wait"

Texts: Acts 1: 6-14

1 Peter 4:12-14, 5:6-11 (Series A, 7th Sunday of Easter) Psalm 68:33-10 33-66

John 17:1-11

Prayer:

"Gracious God - bless now the words of my lips and the meditations of our hearts. Breath your Spirit into us and grant that we may hear and in hearing be led in the way you want us to go. Amen.

Today we celebrate one of the five major markers in the Gospel accounts of the life of Jesus, called the Feast of *Ascension*. The others are his *Baptism*, *Transfiguration*, *Crucifixion*, and *Resurrection*. The Ascension is also one of the essential elements of the Christian faith and one of the significant mysteries in the life of Christ. The bodily Ascension into heaven is also understood by some as the expression of Christ's two natures: divine and human.

Now, there are a lot of people who do not know how to live without excitement. Whether it comes from pleasure - or from crisis - they thrive on activity, on doing things – on solving problems.

Today's scripture reading from the Book of Acts tells us how the disciples found themselves in this kind of situation - how they found themselves having to face a period in which they would simply have to wait for Christ's promise to them to come true.

After the resurrection Jesus visited with his disciples on several occasions. He *taught* them, *he encouraged* them, he *commissioned* them to do a job. Then - on the day of his ascension into heaven when they were anxiously asking him when his kingdom would be established, when the next instalment of the divine plan would take place, he tells them that it is not for them to know the times or periods established by God - but that they should go back to Jerusalem and wait,

- wait for the coming of the Holy Spirit,
- wait for the power they would need to witness in Jerusalem, in Judea and all of Samaria, and ultimately in all the world.

For many of us, waiting is a dreadful thing. Just ask any child, even grown ups don't want to wait. Living between times, living between occasions in which all of our minds and hearts and energy are absorbed in things that are important can, in fact, be quite wonderful.

It can be - for us - a pause *that refreshes* - a time in which we *gain strength* - a time in which we quietly grow and are prepared for that which will come next. God knows that we too need periods of rest - periods of waiting - periods in which we can be *changed - refreshed - and renewed*.

God provides us with periods of time which are times between - periods in which we can be strengthened and prepared for what is to come next.

The prophet Isaiah 40:31 says it so beautifully that:

- those who **wait** for the Lord will **renew** their strength,
- they will mount up on **wings** like eagles,
- they will **run** and not be **weary**, they shall **walk** and not faint.

In this perspective - waiting is a positive thing, the time between the making of a promise and its fulfilment is a time which is, or can be, highly beneficial to us. But living in the times between, such as:

- between one job and another,
- between the period when we have lost one dear friend and have yet to find another, these times can be difficult for us if we do not know how to wait in the manner recommended by the word of God.

So how should we live in the times between?

First - we need to remember the times in between are meant to be active times - not passive times; times in which we are meant to work at that which is at hand - rather than at that which is yet to come.

When Jesus ascended into heaven before the eyes of his disciples to take his place as Lord at the right hand of God the father an angel visited them and asked them: "*Men of Israel - why do you stand looking up toward heaven?*"

This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same manner as you saw him go into heaven."

Our attention should not be focussed so much on Christ's return - or on the next thing that we want to have happen in our lives that we end up forgetting what else is going on, that we end up falling asleep on the job.

In the times between, our eyes are meant to be fixed on the present moment that God has given us and what it is God wants us to do with it and in it. We are called to live now in the way God intended us - rather to live in the future.

While waiting.... we called to care for the needy, the elderly, the homeless, people with HIV/Aids in Africa and elsewhere, defend the defendless, vulnerable and the under dog I our society. We are called to be the hands, feet, mouth, eyes and ears of God.

The disciples heeded the word of the angel who asked them why they were looking up toward heaven -- and they returned to Jerusalem as they had been commanded and waited there for his promise to them to be fulfilled.

And while they **waited** - they devoted themselves to prayer. Which leads to the Second important part of learning how to live in the times between: - namely in those times we are called to live as Christ has shown us how to live - in obedience and in connection with God the Father.

There are many ways to prepare for what we believe is coming next, but in the end - for those who are seeking to do God's will and to see God's promises come true in their midst, prayer is of central importance.

As Jesus told the disciples "you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you - and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria - and to the ends of the world"

Prayer and devotion to the mind and will of God is of central importance because it is this which prepares us for the gift of the Holy Spirit - it this which allows us to be open to the power the Spirit bestows.

We all know about gimmicks, quick ways to improve your body or mind: 99 practical solutions to improve your marriage or to create a better business or build a bigger church; but the real solution lies not in these kinds of gimmicks but in having God's Spirit work through us.

It is the Holy Spirit which enabled and guided the ministry of the disciples, and it is the Holy Spirit which enables and guides our own ministry as his followers, our own witness to Christ -- indeed it is the Spirit, and only the Spirit, which allows us to be fruitful with our lives. As the word of God says

- it is the spirit which gives life... Our task in the times between,
- whether it is a time between what is the work of God,
- or simply a time between one event in our daily lives and another is to make ourselves ready to be used of the Spirit; that Spirit which may come, as it does so often - sooner than we think.

How do we live in the times between? **First** - we need to remember in the times between to focus on what is happening **now**, not on what is going to happen later.

Second - we need to follow the commands of God and keep connected with God through devoted prayer and devotion so that we are strengthened and prepared for the task ahead.

And **Third** - in the times between - we need to *trust* and have *confidence* that what has been promised to us by God will come to pass.

- whether that promise is of a spiritual gift,
- or a promise of comfort and of a new life
- or a promise to bless us and use us in some particular way in his service.

We need the confidence, not because our confidence will change the outcome - what God promises to us will come to pass; No - we need this confidence because when we have it we open ourselves up to the peace of God and the other blessings that God has for us - right now - now in the time between all those other promises and the time of their fulfilment.

We return to Isaiah's words - those words that say -

- those who **wait** for the Lord will **renew** their strength,
- they will **mount up** on **wings** like eagles,
- they will **run** and not be **weary**,
- they shall **walk** and not **faint**.

Notice in this promise the words - **will** and **shall** - and the total lack of modifiers in front of them.

- It is not - they who wait for Lord **might** renew their strength,
- it is not - **maybe** they will walk and not faint -
- it is - they will **renew** their **strength**
- and - they shall **walk** and not **faint**.

Unconditional promises - attached to a simple statement of condition - the condition which says - They who wait for the Lord - or as it says in the King James - they who wait upon the Lord. In the **times between**, the **times of waiting**, trust in the Lord to come through,

- remember his resurrection and his ascension into heaven,
- remember what he has done for you in the past and wait for the next act,
- the next promise to come true with a firm hope.

Trust in the Lord - not in other things - and live today – this day - as he asks us to, connected to God and to his word by prayer and meditation with our brothers and sisters - and in holy obedience whether alone - or at work. Amen.

Let us pray: Let *us* feel Your breath in *our* souls, O Lord. Surround *us* with Your presence and whisper to *our* hearts. Call us out of *our* hesitation, avoidance, and procrastination to spend a little time with you each day. Kick *us* out of *our* whining and self-absorption and draw *us* closer. Only by consciously, deliberately, and willingly loving You, can we begin to love ourselves. Then, we can consciously, deliberately, and willingly, love our neighbors and discover what positive differences we truly are able to make in Your world that is also our island home.* *Amen*.

The Book of Common Prayer, 1979, page 370:

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