

Reflection - Sunday 17th May
John 14:15-21
Loving and walking as we wait

Some of you will know that I am from time to time I travel to London for a couple of projects that I'm involved with more widely in the Methodist Church, it's not something I'm doing at the moment, that's just another part of life which now takes place on Zoom!

When I travel to London, there is one part of the journey home that really frustrates me and it's this: the timetable for the trains from Newcastle to Hexham doesn't in anyway fit with the timetable of the London trains. It doesn't matter which train you get from London it always seems to arrive in Newcastle 5 minutes after the Hexham train has left! This means that you end up waiting in Newcastle station until the next train comes and you are left with the question - what do I do while I wait? It's not quite a long enough wait to go and do anything significant or have a meal but it is long enough to leave you feeling frustrated that you're not on your way back home to Hexham. I've discovered that in the winter it calls for a cup of coffee and in the summer an ice cream!

What do we do while we wait?

Our reading today speaks into that question, what do we do while we wait?

Waiting for what you might ask?

Well there are a number of waitings going on this in passage, in the Christian life and at the moment in life for during this unusual time of COVID-19.

The observant amongst you, which is all of you I'm sure, will have noticed that our passage today continues from the passage that Nigel spoke on last week. In fact it is the middle of a passage which come as part of the farewell discourse in John's Gospel. The farewell discourse is a section of passages in John chapters 14-17 where Jesus is preparing the disciples for the time after his death. The passage Nigel shared on last week, our passage today and the verses that follow from v22-27 are a section where Jesus seeks to convey to the disciples that they don't need to be afraid about his death because he is going to prepare a place for them, because he is the way and the truth and the life and because he will send the Holy Spirit to be with them until the time that he returns. We know it is one passage because it is bookended by the advice 'do not let your hearts be troubled', beginning in verse 1 with those words and ending with them again in verse 27.

There are many waitings here, the passage is set in the context of waiting for Jesus' death and resurrection to take place, there is the waiting between Good Friday and Easter Sunday, there is the knowledge that we wait in some ways to die where we will go to the place Jesus has promised, there is the waiting for the Jesus to send the helper, the advocate, the Holy Spirit after he returns to heaven - which he refers to in verse 19 when he says 'before long, the world will not see me anymore'.

Waiting, lots of waiting, what do we do while we wait?

Our readings since Easter have helped us to meet the risen Jesus, the Easter Jesus and to think about how we live with the risen Jesus. One of the reasons this passage is the passage for today is that this week we begin to draw towards the end of the Easter season. This coming Thursday is 40 days after Easter Sunday, it's called Ascension Day, when we mark Jesus' return to heaven, his ascension which you can read about in Acts 1. There is then 10 days from Ascension to Pentecost, on Sunday 31st May, when we celebrate the pouring out of the Holy Spirit, the advocate the helper, on the Church. God ensuring the Church on earth is not left without God.

The period between Ascension to Pentecost is a waiting time, a waiting time after Jesus has ascended and before the spirit is poured out.

What do we do while we wait?

It seems to me this year that this period of waiting reflects something of the way that life is at the moment. As a country we are waiting for so much, waiting in the unknown, wondering what the future will be like. When will we be able to worship in the same building again, when will we be able to visit our families, when will we be able to go to work again, when will we be able to go to the shops? It feels like so much has been taken away from us, as the risen Jesus was taken away from the disciples when he ascended into heaven, and that we are waiting for normality to return, as the disciples waited for the spirit to come and looked to when Jesus would return. Of course when the spirit came at Pentecost it wasn't as the disciples expected, it was different, more powerful, more wonderful, more life changing than they ever imagined. As I and many others have said when we return to normal, life will not be the same as it was before, it will be different, it will be a new normal, a new start and I hope that like pentecost it will be more life changing that we could ever imagine.

But what do we do whilst we wait?

How do we live as followers of Jesus in the waiting and not just simply wait for this time to pass and 'normal' to return.

I think this passage offers us two very clear instructions as to what we should do while we wait.

Firstly, Jesus tells us to keep his commands, he says it right at the beginning 'If you love me, keep my commands'. If you think back to where Nigel finished last week with his message about what it means to follow Jesus this is the next step, if you follow Jesus, if you know Jesus is the way, the truth and the life, then follow his commands. We don't need to keep any rules or commandments to follow Jesus, but when we choose to follow, when we encounter Jesus we realise his way is the way to live and that leads us to want to keep his commands.

Jesus's commands are of course found throughout the gospels and the Bible as a whole but they are summed up by Jesus in Matthew 22:37-39 when Jesus answers the question 'what is the greatest commandment?' Jesus says: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbour as yourself.' All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments." Then in John Chapter 13, just before the passage we are looking at today Jesus gives the disciples

a new commandments 'Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.'

We know in John 14 Jesus is referring to more than just the new commandments in John 13 as he says 'follow my commands, plural and as I've already said Jesus' commands are throughout scripture but if we were to summarise them we might say 'Love God, Love Yourself, Love Others as I, Jesus, have shown you'.

As we wait first and foremost we are called to keep Jesus' commands, commands to Love God, Love Yourself, Love Others as Jesus has shown us'.

Secondly, Jesus tells the disciples about the Spirit, the advocate, the helper who the Father will send to help them, and us, follow Jesus commands. Jesus tells the disciples at the end of Luke's gospel to wait until they are clothed from on high with the Holy Spirit in whose power they will continue their ministry in the early Church, which we've been thinking about in our Tuesday night Bible Studies. We of course don't have to wait until Pentecost for the Holy Spirit, Pentecost is our celebration of the Holy Spirit being poured out on the Church but the Spirit is here now, we have the advocate, the helper now, we live as God's people in the power of the Holy Spirit.

So the second instruction embedded in this passage is in our waiting to live in the power of the Holy Spirit, to wait in the power of the Holy Spirit, to be listening to the power of the Holy Spirit, to be guided in our actions, our worship, our praying, our planning by the Holy Spirit. In my experience if we seek to live the Christian life without the power of the Holy Spirit we become very passive, very flat, very thought all of which are good but when we live in the power of the Holy Spirit we become alive, we become vibrant, we become active and get involved with what God is doing.

So what's the message here, to those who want to follow Jesus, to those who believe he is the way, the truth and the life. The message is Love God, Love Yourself, Love Others as Jesus has shown us but don't do so in your own power do so in the power of the Holy Spirit, for the spirit will guide you, help you, advocate for you as you Love God, Love Yourself and Love Others.

So what do we do whilst we wait?

We Love God, Love Yourself, Love Others as Jesus has shown us in the power of the Holy Spirit.

Of course the reality is, that this is the constant call to us as Christians, it's not just something we do whilst we wait for 'normal' to return, it's not just something we do from Ascension to Pentecost, it's not just something we do when these readings come round in the lectionary.

This is the constant call of the people of God, **Love God, Love Yourself, Love Others as Jesus has shown us and to do so in the power of the Holy Spirit.** Yet so often we add layers of other stuff into our Christian life, we find lots of other things to do, to keep us busy, often good things but often they distract us from that core call as to Christians to Love God, Love Yourself, Love Others as Jesus has shown us in the power of the Holy Spirit. It's a bit like that station platform at Newcastle I could read a book, pray, ring a friend, sit and enjoy the stillness - which there often is

late at night - but what do I do, look at Facebook or twitter on my phone, eat an ice cream, distract myself with other things, wander round aimlessly to keep warm.

So what do we do whilst we wait?

What do we do as we wait for a new normal to emerge?

I think we just need one word to help us, to preface what we are called as Christians to do the rest of the time and that word is 'refocus:'

Refocus: Love God, Love Yourself, Love Others as Jesus has shown us in the power of the Holy Spirit.

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This time whilst things are different gives us the opportunity to refocus on what's important. We've heard so many stories of this haven't we, we've had time to ring friends to focus on those friendships, we've had time to clear out the cupboards throwing away what we don't need, refocussing on what we do need, we've had time to enjoy baking and planting, refocussing on what gives us enjoyment.

The foundation of all of those things though are our faith in Jesus, it is our faith, our loving of God, Self, Others which puts all those other things in context. Therefore in this time we must take the opportunity to: Refocus: Love God, Love Yourself, Love Others as Jesus has shown us in the power of the Holy Spirit.

Taking time to refocus will enable God to show us what is important, how we can best Love God, Love Ourselves, Love Others. Time for God to show us what we should put first and what God is asking of us next. In sharing what God says to us it will help us a Church to understand what God wants us to do as we reemerge and what God wants us to celebrate and leave behind.

Refocussing on God, refocussing on Jesus' commands, living in the power of the spirit will mean we are ready, are ready for the next steps, ready for COVID Pentecost, ready to reemerge and serve God afresh, ready to be blown away by God as we witness to his love in the same way the disciples were when the spirit was poured out on them.

So what do we do whilst we wait for lockdown to lift, for shops to reopen, for Church doors to be swung wide? The answer: Love God, Love Yourself, Love Others as Jesus has shown us in the power of the Holy Spirit as we seek to do the rest of the year round. The opportunity we have is to refocus on what that means for us, how we can best do it, where the Spirit is leading us.

So I invite you to do just that, especially in this traditional period of waiting from ascension to Pentecost, to refocus on the foundations of faith, to refocus on Loving God, Loving Yourself, Loving Others and as you do that in the power of the spirit to listen, or should I say be alert, to what God is saying to us and showing us about the future.

When you are waiting at Newcastle station, whatever you do with your time, the key is to be on the platform when the train arrives because it does arrive and if you miss it you have a long wait for the next one!

It's exactly the same with this period we are waiting in at the moment, the end will come and as the people of God we need to make sure we don't miss the opportunities we will have when it comes, opportunities to Love God, Love Yourself, Love Others as Jesus has shown us in the power of the Holy Spirit, opportunities to do these key things in the most appropriate way we can for God so that more people come to know of his love.

So what do we do while we wait?

Refocus: Love God, Love Yourself, Love Others as Jesus has shown us in the power of the Holy Spirit.

Love God, Love Yourself, Love Others as Jesus has shown us in the power of the Holy Spirit.

I am sure doing this will be a blessing to us all, will help us to walk closer with God and be a blessing to us all.

Amen.