

# The Gift of Waiting

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In some ways, lock-down during Covid-19 feels like perpetual waiting. We wait for the next level to be able to do freely, what we used doing before. We wait for the President's speeches in anticipation. We wait for schools to re-open. For those in temporary shelters, or those managing them, the wait might be different. What will happen after lockdown? Will the shelter close down? Will I have to return to the streets?

Waiting can be frustrating, and, some of us think, a serious waste of time. We lose valuable opportunities and we are not getting younger. Let us consider Acts 1:4-8 for a moment this morning.

## **Acts 1:4-8**

*4 On one occasion, while he was eating with them, he gave them this command: "Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about. 5 For John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit." 6 Then they gathered around him and asked him, "Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?" 7 He said to them: "It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority. 8 But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."*

In this first scene of the Book of Acts, the disciples were also in waiting. In a way they were still trembling with fear after all that transpired in Jerusalem. They were still perplexed by the violent death meted out to their friend and leader, Jesus. They were still half-way between doubt and faith that Jesus really is the Christ, risen from the dead. They were waiting for something to happen, but were not sure what. Waiting can be a lost opportunity. Or it can be a gift.

After Jesus's resurrection, he appeared to his disciples a few times. And usually they did what Jesus and them enjoyed to do: they had a meal together. Meals, if done slowly and with intent, become places of memory-making, community-building, sustenance for the long journey. In a time of waiting, meals especially become important rituals, in which we try to make sense together of where we are at.

So in Acts 1 this is no different. They were eating together and Jesus said to them, do not rush to leave Jerusalem. Your Father in heaven promised you a gift – wait for it here; soon enough you will receive it. Then, in their desire for quick restoration and perhaps a rapid conclusion to things, they asked, in anticipation: 'Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom of Israel?'. They hoped the resurrected Christ will use his power to make new what was broken. To redeem what was lost. To restore what was fallen apart. But the Risen One, like he did so often, did not give them the answer they wanted. Instead, he said to them, they will be empowered by the Holy Spirit, to witness to the resurrection, not only in Jerusalem, but to the ends of the earth.

Basically what Jesus says to them here, is: Do not rush away. And miss the gift. In the waiting, you are being prepared for a mission much bigger than yourselves. In the waiting, they are shaped into a movement – small and fragile at first glance, but with the possibility to overturn things across the world. In the waiting, something creative and radical are being born in your midst, even though you might not see it or recognize it yet. But once the Holy Spirit is given to you, you will be filled with power, to unleash that which is building up in you. You will be given eyes to see and ears to hear and courage to act.

Waiting can be a creative time. A time in which our meal-time conversations, and silences, and different rhythm to the crazy one we are used to, can allow for the creative shaping in us of a work we are called to do, but could not see or embrace, before. Creative waiting is to not be rushed to the next moment, but to take it easy – step-by-step doing what is to be done, because, in an invisible way, it is a time in which the Spirit shapes in us new depth of character, new temperament, new vision, and new urgency, to heal what is broken, and to do justice where things are seriously wrong. Wait, creatively.

Waiting can also be a radical time. Radical, in the sense of going back to the roots of things (radical comes from the word radix, which means, roots). In many shelters people said in the past weeks, “we have experienced love for the first time”. “I learnt that I should be on antidepressants and never knew it before. Now everything suddenly falls into place. I am a new person”. Many said they do not want to return to a lifestyle of substance use. Others want to return to their families and asked for help to do so. Churches asked themselves what it mean to be church, and decided to open up permanent spaces to welcome the stranger in their midst. Buildings are being identified that stand empty, to house those who are abandoned by society and state.

This waiting, like the one of the disciples, is thrown upon us. They did not choose the violence of religion and state to kill their beloved Jesus. We did not choose the violence of Covid-19 to visit us, causing anguish, illness and death. But in this waiting, if we do it with open hearts and minds, we can sense the Creator Spirit doing new things. We have seen moving images and clips of nature being restored in places as humans take their rightful place. We have heard of people being restored to life and new beginnings, as they had no choice but to confront themselves. We have heard of churches called out from places of apathy to missions going far beyond themselves.

In John 12 verse 24 Jesus said: *“Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit”*.

This could be a time of waste, if the deaths of thousands across the world, and the loss of businesses and income, are only that: death, and loss. But Jesus provides us with a different vision, saying, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains along. But if it dies, it bears much fruit. Could the death of some, be redemptive for the whole world, ushering in a new time of rest for the earth, rest for humanity, rest for the city.

Whilst some rush, through courts and noise, to re-open everything that is closed down, to return to ‘normal’ in how we treat the poor, and trash the earth, and fall out of rhythm with ourselves, Jesus says: Wait, the Spirit will be given to you, and you will have much power to do what I have done, and to do much more!

What has happened to you during this wait? What happened in your shelter? What happened with the people living in community? What is the creative thing God is doing in your midst? What is the radical thing opening up among you? Don’t waste the wait. But open your hearts, minds and eyes, for the promise of the Spirit is to be given to you.

**Prayer:**

Lord Jesus, open our eyes, to see afresh  
Holy Spirit, turn our waiting into a gift like never before  
Creator of the Universe, blow over your creation  
Like a fresh wind, blow away the dust within  
Creating in us, something new, we have not known before. *Amen*