

WAITING FOR THE SPIRIT

All Age Service: the Sunday after Ascension (and before Pentecost)

Acts 1.6-11

Quiz time – (with sweets!)

What day was it 3 days ago? Ascension Day

43 days ago? Easter

45 days ago? Good Friday

89 days ago? Ash Wednesday

143 days ago? Christmas

And in seven days time? Pentecost.

We're in the time between Ascension and Pentecost.
That's a time for waiting – but it's a very active waiting.
What are we waiting for?

The Holy Spirit.

Jesus said to his disciples: wait. Wait for what the Father has promised. Wait for the power that you need to be my witnesses: not just here, but all over the world.

That was a long time ago. But even now, I'm waiting for us, here and now, to receive the power that we need to be all that God has created us to be; to do all that he wants us to do. To receive what the Father has promised.

This is a special time. At the ascension, Jesus takes his place on the throne of heaven. He is king, he is lord, there is no one and nothing more important than him. Those other dates – just let me remind you: at Christmas, God, the God who made the universe, the God who had all authority over heaven and earth and anywhere else that might exist, became a human being – a tiny baby. God became one of us. Because – he loved the world – that's you and me and everyone else – so much that he came to show us what he was like. Jesus was born, he grew up, and he showed the world what God is like. He is loving, forgiving, accepting. He is also just, and kind.

People couldn't cope with that, so on Good Friday, they captured him, and tortured him, and nailed him to a cross. They thought they could get rid of him – but you can't get rid of God. That's why it's Good Friday – the day when Jesus faced the worst enemy of all, death – and took the fear away from it. He died, absolutely, and went into the darkness of the journey – and was unable to be held by it. He rose up from the dead – that's Easter Day. And after that he kept appearing to people – he kept on loving them, helping them, teaching them. You

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could never tell when he was going to appear – beside the lake, in an upper room, next his empty grave, on a walk.

But even so, he could only ever be at one place at one time. He was still limited by humanness, even though, in his resurrected body, he could do a lot of things that we can't do – walk through walls, turn up anywhere. But he couldn't be present with me, and at the same time with our friend Caren in Kenya, with the people in the orphanage in Mongolia, with our friends in Sweden.

Until – this time. Forty days, we are told, after Easter, something most unexpected happened. He took his disciples on a walk, up a hill. He blessed them – I wish I knew what he said and did, but blessing is about God giving himself into our lives – he blessed them. He'd already told them that there was more to come, that they would have to wait for it for what the father had promised. Power is coming – power for you to be my witnesses all over the earth. The Holy Spirit was coming – the Holy Spirit, like a huge gift, wrapped up, about to be opened and to release God's power and his presence into every corner of the earth. Wait for this, he said. And then, as they watched, Jesus was lifted up and he disappeared into a cloud – maybe they had a hint of this when the three went with him onto the mountain and he was transfigured – do you remember that? He went to sit down on his throne in heaven, so that he

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could release the power of the Holy Spirit. And that's the bit we celebrate next Sunday – Pentecost, when that power was released, and has never stopped

Power that is there for us, all of us. My prayer for us is that we will know that power, that we will know the filling of our lives with the Spirit. So often we can be like a torch without any batteries – everything is right, but there's no power. It doesn't work. We pray, we sing, we come to church, and we find that actually, if we're completely honest, we're disappointed. Our faith doesn't quite take off, there's something lacking. Something that God has promised to give. The filling with power from on high: the battery that will make us work.

These next weeks for us are about finding that battery, the power, the life, the breath, whatever word you want to use. It's exciting! Because I know it's there to be found. Jesus has ascended into heaven. All power and authority and majesty are his: he's the king. And because we know what he is like – because he came to live among us – we also know what sort of king he is. We know that we can approach heaven itself with confidence, because the King of heaven – is our friend. It's Jesus. Jesus – who is held by nothing now, limited by nothing. He is completely free, completely powerful. Completely our God.

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And the gift that comes from our God, our Jesus, is one for us to open. It's not a good story: it's real, and it's coming. Jesus said wait. wait till this gift is in your hands and you will receive the Holy Spirit. And then who knows what will happen!

As we wait in silence

All: Make us ready for your coming Spirit

As we listen to your word

All: Make us ready for your coming Spirit

As we worship you in majesty

All: Make us ready for your coming Spirit

As we long for your refreshing

All: Make us ready for your coming Spirit

As we long for your renewing

All: Make us ready for your coming Spirit

As we long for your equipping

All: Make us ready for your coming Spirit

As we long for your empowering

All: Make us ready for your coming Spirit