

Acts 1:12-26, Psalm 68:1-10, 1 Peter 4:12-19, John 17:1-11

Christ is Risen! He has risen indeed, Alleluia!

There was once a congregation that faced many challenges: financial, attracting members, and dwindling attendance. The council met to tackle these challenges. Members offered thoughts and ideas as a way forward. Some were met with agreement, and others we met with the excuse, "we tried that before." Then someone suggested they slow down and pray about it. Pray about it? We do not have time for that. We need to act now! You can sense the frustration and anxiety.

To pray means to wait. To pray means to wait for God to act in His time. To pray means to wait for a revelation of the way forward for the good of the congregation. Waiting is difficult.

Our first reading from Acts tells of this time of waiting between Jesus' ascension into heaven and the day of Pentecost. Before Jesus ascended into heaven to sit at the right hand of God the Father, Jesus told the disciples to return to Jerusalem and wait for the power from on high. So today we find them waiting. For ten days they waited. May have seemed longer. Waiting could not have been easy.

That is God's way with His people. We want what we want and want it when we want it. But God gives in His own time. Abraham waited for twenty-five years before the son He promised was born. The Children of Israel waited for over Four Hundred years in Egypt before God led them out of slavery. They waited thousands of years for the fulfillment of the promise made to Eve in the Garden of Eden for the one to bruise the serpent's head. But these were not wasted years. God was using this time to prepare to the people for the work He would do.

So, ten days of waiting for the disciples doesn't seem all that bad, does it? Except living in that moment, they had no idea of the time frame, but Jesus had said it would be soon.

What did they do in this time? They prayed. I suppose they prayed from the prayer book of the bible, the Psalms. They get Psalm 69:25, "May their camp be a desolation; let no one dwell in their tents." Peter sees this as reference to Judas who had been one of them and betrayed Jesus. Later they come upon Psalm 109:8, "May his days be few, and another take his office." A reference to the replacement of Judas to complete the contingent of Twelve Apostles.

Of course, they had heard these words before through their attendance of weekly services, but in Jesus and all they had seen and experienced they heard these words in a new way. It had to be a sad soul wrenching feeling when Judas one of their own, who lived among them, who learned from the Jesus like them would go to betray Jesus. It may have been a shock to the eleven disciples, but it was no surprise to God, or even to Jesus. It had to happen in this way. It was right there in the Psalms which had been written a thousand or so years earlier. All that happened to Jesus went according to plan.

Then learned in praying this scripture that Judas had to be replaced. The work of the Crucified, risen, and now ascended Jesus would go on. They sensed through their prayer that God had not given up on them just yet. Yes, even with Judas' betrayal, Peter's denials, Thomas' doubting, James, and John's glory seeking ambitions, and each and every one's struggle to believe the ministry was going to move forward, yes, even with these flawed and sinful people. So, Judas's Office was filled though through their prayers and waiting to see who God would choose. And God choose Matthias. God's Word would be fulfilled. This time of waiting became active, praying, and discerning God's will for them, in this time between ascension and Pentecost. I wonder what the anticipation would have been like for them.

They were in that in between time two thousand years ago, and so are we two thousand years later. We are between the first coming of Jesus in the Flesh at Christmas and His promised Second coming when Our Lord will return in glory with the angels in the clouds. These times are not easy. They can be hard, difficult, and challenging. In some of my study and reading, particularly in the area of how the church prepared converts for baptism to become members of the Church, nothing has really changed all that much over the course of two thousand years. People were baptized without follow-up and never heard from again. So, nothing is new under the sun.

The same dangers still exists, "the devil is prowling around like a hungry lion seeking someone to devour." That someone was those first disciples and you, today's disciples.

The devil does not reveal himself in a red suit with pitchfork for he is trickier than that. He uses others, power, riches, and popularity, the media, gossip to ruin

reputations, our fleshly weaknesses to attack. He uses our impatience to make rash decisions that are not in accordance with God's purpose to lead us down a deadly path. We can look, read, and hear of reports how the church is being targeted for her beliefs because they do not go along with the cultural narrative. We hear of persecutions and wonder if God is really involved in preparing and working for His fulfillment at the end.

What do we do? Our disciples returned to Jerusalem and prayed. They got into the Word of God and in prayer. It sustained them in their faith, even in times when it was most fragile. It helped them in times of attacks from the devil. The Word encouraged them that God is indeed faithful to His promises. It teaches us that some of the things that are happening may shock us, yet our God never is. Our Lord continues to work for us and our salvation.

In our Gospel, we see that Jesus is praying what has become known as the High Priestly prayer. He intercedes for his disciples just before His betrayal. Jesus knew of the fiery trials, the difficulties, and anxiousness of the times between His Ascension into heaven and His second coming. He prays for those given to Him by His Father, His disciples then and His disciples today, for you and me.

Soon Jesus is to go to the cross, St John puts it, to be glorified. To perform the glorious His High Priestly act to die for us, to win for us forgiveness and bring us back to God. This where Jesus is glorified. Tough to see the glory in it. But when you compare the false glories of this world: Popularity which fades, riches that come and go, power that fails, and pleasures that vanish. The glory of the Holy Cross is everlasting for shows God's love for sinners like us which would cause our Lord to go there and die for us. If you think about it, it was Jesus' in between time, suspending between Heaven and earth, life, and death, in place of sinner to reconcile us back to God our Father.

Because of the Cross and His resurrection, we are protected in this day as we the church await Jesus' coming again. He continues to intercede on our behalf to the Father, giving what we need. To give us the fruit of His Cross, forgiveness, faith, may be made known in each of us. He prays that we may be made holy and be kept in His Word.

How else can we explain that the Church is still here today. God continues to give His Spirit, His forgiveness, and His supper that strengthens us as His people.

Yes, The Church has its challenges, In the midst of these challenges we have His Word and promise that encourages, strengthens, and comforts. In anxious times and uncertainty this Word drives us to prayer. In the Word and prayer, we find Jesus who there for us.

He is here for us in this supper, where we partake of His body and blood to be strengthened to go into our own callings to bear His name in this community. Even in adversity, He will keep you until He comes again for you to take you the place He has prepared for you.