

## Sermon by Rev Canon Martin Greenfield for Sunday 24 May 2020.

### Acts chapter 1

#### How long, O Lord? How long?

It is clear in the bible that we have to learn to wait in hope; indeed God seems to expect us to be good at waiting and hoping.

How long? Yes, well, how long is my hair going to get before someone can cut it? And how long before we can see our friends and families? How long before lockdown restrictions are lifted? How long before a successful vaccination against COVID 19 is found? And – this is the biggest ‘How long’ in the Bible – how long until Jesus comes again?

In our reading from Acts, chapter 1, the risen Jesus spoke to the apostles. He died, was raised and he appeared to them over 40 days, demonstrating that he was truly risen. Then came the day when, bodily, he left them and ascended to his Father. But, before then, he told his apostles, in v 4

*‘Wait for the Holy Spirit, the gift my Father promised’.*

How very often in the Bible God waits. God seems to have no problem with waiting, and to be rather good at it.

Long ago, the ‘Access’ credit card had a slogan, “It takes the waiting out of wanting”. I think we are all aware that Christian faith does not give us a type of card that removes waiting! God seems to like keeping us waiting; so I suppose it must be good for us.

Children find it hard to wait, don’t they? One of my children, about ten minutes into a car journey, would always ask, ‘Are we nearly there?’ As parents we would say, ‘You haven’t had a sleep yet’. That seemed to help. But we adults may not be good at waiting either. God however wants us to learn to wait in hope, and be good at waiting.

You’ll notice that I am linking “waiting” with “hoping”, and that is because in the bible they are almost the same.

Turn with me to Psalm 130, and we’ll look at verses 5 and 6:

*5. I wait for the Lord, my soul waits,  
and in his word I put my hope.*

*6 I wait for the Lord,  
more than watchmen wait for the morning,  
more than watchmen wait for the morning.*

It will help if I explain a bit of the Hebrew; bear with me. In verse 5, there are two Hebrew words meaning ‘wait’.

*I wait for the Lord, my soul waits* – the word for ‘wait’ is *KIWAH*.

*In his word I hope* - the word for ‘hope’ is *YAKAL*. And actually, *YAKAL* also means to wait!

Perhaps, to bring out the sense, it could go:

***I wait for the Lord, and for his word I wait (hopefully).***

You see, to hope is to wait. The best illustration I can give comes from an experience many of us regularly have at this time of social distancing – from shopping. When we go to the supermarket, we have to queue outside, with suitable distancing. Then we wait, and we wait; but our waiting is not pointless because we have a confident hope that we shall be allowed in to shop, provided that we wait.

Faith in God means having to wait; when we are able to wait patiently we grow in our hope.

Examples:

Let me give two examples from the book of Genesis.

1. The flood. God alerted Noah to the flood that was coming, and he told him to build a huge 'ark'; this he did, and he and his family went in along with countless animals in order to be kept safe. Then it rained for 40 days. The floods were over the earth for 150 days before they began to recede. Altogether, Noah and his party were inside that ark for over a year! They had to learn to wait and be patient.
2. Abraham. God promised Abraham that, through his descendants, all the world's nations would find blessing. However, for a long time, Abraham had no son. God waited, and Abraham had to wait also. Lord, how long? When the long-awaited son Isaac was finally born, Abraham was 100 and Sarah was 90.

There are other examples you might think of as well.

How long? When the apostles met with Jesus, they asked him when he would restore the kingdom to Israel. He said to them, 'It is not for you to know times or dates' (Acts 1:6-7).

In the book of Revelation, God's people going through great suffering ask, How long until you judge the earth? Then they are 'told to wait a little longer' (Revelation 6:10-11).

So, waiting is a necessary part of our lives. It requires patience and endurance.

See...

Romans 8:23-25 . We groan inwardly as we wait (for Jesus to come again) ... If we hope for what we do not yet have, we wait for it patiently.

See also 1 Corinthians 1:7, 1 Thessalonians 1:10, Titus 2:13.

**How long, O Lord? God wants us to be good at waiting and hoping.**

Questions for discussion.

General:

1. Are you good at waiting. Why? In what circumstances do you have to wait?
2. Can you think of occasions when it has been good to have had to wait?
3. Why do so many (including within the church) hate waiting?
4. 'The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience...' What is patience?
5. How can we learn to be better at waiting patiently?

Bible.

- a. Can you think of other occasions in the bible when God waited for a long time? Or when God made people wait for a long time?
- b. At Isaiah 40:31, it says, Those who wait for / hope in the Lord will renew their strength etc. What do you think it means to 'wait for' the Lord? How can we do it? Can we 'wait for' the Lord quickly?

Coronavirus crisis.

- God has not sent this virus upon the earth. But are there lessons we can only learn by having to wait?
- Do we as a society need to be better at waiting?