

15th May 2021 - 10am service - Waiting
Leader: Michelle Harris; Speaker: Andrew Attwood

[Michelle:]

good morning

[Andrew:]

morning this is weird this feels very weird

we are live from the building

[Michelle:]

oh yeah

how weird is that

very odd there's only me andrew and tech here um so yeah it's um it's our dry run isn't it

[Andrew:]

it is an absolute dry run it feels kind of big echoey and empty right now but um nice to be back in here doing something for god yes

just really odd anyway i will see you in a bit okay

[Michelle:]

um so yeah hopefully i'll screech over this um hopefully you will have received the notices from denise um

oh sorry welcome to st john's i'm michelle the youth worker that's andrew he's our vicar and we'll be speaking to us later um yeah

hopefully you'll receive the notices from denise which had a letter in it from andrew and a group of co-leaders explaining um kind of some differences that might be going forwards

and also you'll have received a video and photo consent form for when we do come back into the building so that if you want to be on screen um like me then um yeah we need your permission to do that so you need to fill one of those in okay that's those essential ones

oh and for coming back um we're going to have a ticketing service so that might sound a bit like oh my goodness what we've got to do it's really really simple i'm hoping that we'll be able to get a picture up of what we're going to be looking at we're going to use eventbrite and eventbrite allows you to just book a ticket they're free tickets you don't have to pay we're only allowed 50 people in the building so we've got 35 tickets available on the website you only need a ticket for an adult - children do not need tickets um and we've only got four services that we're going to do for ticketing and we're asking because we've only got 50 people allowed can you just book two so that then everyone gets an opportunity to come and be in the service before we can then obviously all be back hopefully please lord um and get everyone back in the building as we were before um so yeah that's eventbrite if you just search for either 10am worship service or st john's church kenilworth either of those searches on eventbrite will bring up the first service and then you can choose an option to choose dates on the bottom right as well so you can switch between different dates

um so that's coming back and video consent form and eventbrite i think that's everything on notices for now um so let's start our service shall we let's start with a prayer

father god thank you that we can have this time here this morning thank you um yeah that we are coming back to the building slowly but surely father would you help us to settle our hearts now would you help us to get our heads into the right headspace where we're ready to spend some time with you
let's open with the lord's prayer

our father in heaven hallowed be your name
your kingdom come your will be done on earth as it is in heaven
give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our sins
as we forgive those who sin against us
lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil

for the kingdom the power and the glory are yours
now and forever amen

um i was doing lectio 365 this morning and i just wanted to read the little bit that they started with because i really liked it so they read from psalm 51 verses 10 to 12.

create in me a pure heart oh god and
renew a steadfast spirit within me
do not cast me from your presence or
take your holy spirit from me
restore to me the joy of your salvation
and grant me a willing spirit to sustain me

right um our theme for this morning is about waiting and so i thought i'd do ye a little task so i want you to close your eyes in a minute um and i'm gonna set a timer and i want you to try and work out when it gets to a minute um i mean i don't know how good you are at guessing time i'm generally not very good i'm going to give you a go and see how it goes so on your marks and when you think it's time you know to know either need to put your hand up or to stand up i don't mind which your choice i can't see you anyway um so yeah on your marks get set go

i'm not going to stay quiet the whole time because that will kind of make it really easy and you won't get distracted whereas the more that i talk the more that you'll be distracted and especially if i do things like throwing in some numbers like 15 or 10 or 2 or 36 or [Music] or i can ask you about your holiday like where are you going has anyone got a holiday booked i don't know i mean we're going on holidays some in august going to a lovely cornwall have you got anywhere planned how's the counting going have you lost count yet how good are you at waiting when i was a kid and i used to wait i'd quite often like when i was little little i'd lie on the safer and put my feet in the air and like just be waiting and waiting because it feels like forever like a minute feels like a really really really long time but like other times it goes really really quickly

now yeah that's the minute i just gave andrew heart attack so yeah i don't know how good your waiting skills are like i say when i was little well actually quite often now i get quite rubbish at waiting i don't like waiting especially when i don't know what's coming or if i do know what's coming like we're moving house soon and i know i'm really looking forward to moving house and i know it's going to be exciting but oh my goodness the waiting whilst we're waiting for the paperwork to go through there's a long wait um anyway right so let's have some worship let's focus our hearts on guard our eyes on god and yeah we're going to sing

[Music: Hosanna (Praise is Rising)]

[Music: if faith can move the mountains]

amen so we've got our reading and then andrew's going to come and speak to us acts chapter 1 verses 1 to 10.

in my former book theophilus i wrote about all that jesus began to do and to teach until the day he was taken up to heaven after giving instructions through the holy spirit to the apostles he had chosen after his suffering he presented himself to them and gave many convincing proofs that he was alive he appeared to them over a period of 40 days and spoke about the kingdom of god 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 for john baptized with water but in a few days you will be baptized with the holy spirit then they gathered around him and asked him lord are you at this time

going to restore the kingdom to israel he said to them it's not for you to know the times or dates the father has set by his own authority 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 after he had said this he was taken up before their very eyes and a cloud hid him from their sight they were looking intently up into the sky as he was going when suddenly two men dressed in white stood beside them men of galilee they said why do you stand here looking into the sky this same jesus who has been taken from you into heaven will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven

can i pray for you before you start

[Andrew:]

yeah please

[Michelle:]

father god thank you for andrew thank you for the time and the preparation that he's put into his talk today father would you use him now to speak through speak your words would you speak through him would you use him would you bless him as he speaks to us amen

[Andrew:]

amen thank you michelle

i was thinking this morning this is going to be my last online only talk goodness knows for how long maybe there'll be other things in the future but it feels like coming to the end of a very strange season just to add a brief notice before i get into the talk michelle mentioned communications that have already been sent out there's going to be an additional letter that is going to go out to the whole church um describing in a bit more detail what we're expecting to be doing in practice at our 10am services because it is going to be different in conjunction with talking with wardens and co-leaders we really want to do something different to focus on the presence of god and on what he wants to do amongst us so it is going to be different and the piece of paper the document should get you ready in anticipation for that inevitably um the first four weeks are going to be unusual anyway because it's still social distance we're going to be spread out in a different kind of way but it's nevertheless going to be steps towards a different way of being church on sundays so that will be sent to you at some point this week

so the subject of waiting uh even even just now while we were listening to uh the songs there it dawned on me when i first became a christian at the age of 19 the very first thing jesus ever said to me was andrew you've finally come home and i thought he'd been waiting for me he'd been waiting for years for me in other words it's in god's own nature to wait and to long for something and to desire something and in that instance it was longing and waiting for me to turn around to him so the subject of waiting is part of our god-given design the passage that michelle read earlier is describing jesus departure his physical departure from the 12 and 120 who are mentioned later and it's preparing them for the coming of the holy spirit

now let me just deconstruct that a moment and give you a bit of background jesus had invested three whole years with the twelve in particular perfect discipleship training absolutely perfect preparation for what he wanted them to do in his absence effectively to make disciples just like he had been making disciples that's what you read in the great commission so they're really ready they're trained up but the command on his ascension is not to go straight away but to wait first and this is a key feature of jesus call to all disciples you're not simply sent to go in your own strength you're commanded to wait to be empowered because he's sending them out as his witnesses and if there's no power in the witness it goes nowhere

so jesus was preparing his people to be led by the holy spirit like he had done and that that would be the new mode for church now they'd been watching this for the whole of the three years that they'd been with him they'd seen an empowered spirit-filled man doing it so they knew what it looked like they knew what it looked like to be able to move and speak and act and heal and perform miracles

and lead people into a relationship with god they knew what that looked like and they'd even had a small taste of it when he'd sent them out on those early forays to try it for themselves and he'd authorized them and they'd experienced something of that power but they hadn't been filled in the way that jesus was expecting a complete and fulfilling of the holy spirit

so for jesus this was an essential it wasn't an add-on it wasn't something as a kind of an afterthought that they might need this was absolutely a command and a given when i ever read these accounts of the command to wait and then what happened next it always makes me reflect on my own sense of power or lack of power in my witness

and i wondered if at this particular time in western uk church history we are being described if you like or redescribed as being quite powerless compared to how we felt at other times i don't know how you feel in terms of your ability to influence around you your ability to say things that are heard or maybe in the media it's forever voices that are saying critical things of things to do with the faith or church or christianity in general

do you struggle in your reaching out how effective do you feel in your ability to make disciples for me there is a sense of limited power a sense of limited effectiveness so i just wonder what that is saying at the moment in terms of the urgency to wait i wonder if this is a phase for us as a church community to be retrained

i think we are different from the 12 in that they'd had three years of excellent high quality training into exactly how to do this and i know for myself including through lockdown but even before there's been a sense of being dismantled or deconstructed in terms of what i thought it meant to be a christian and to do church so much has had to be taken apart i know but over time it's almost as though god is just gradually putting it back together so that i can see what i'm actually meant to be doing and so this call to wait includes a knowledge that i really really don't want to simply go back to how things were as before

i can remember years ago now this is possibly four or five years ago saying to the church in this building on a number of times that god had interrupted me and said andrew can i lead the church and back then naively and trivially i said well of course lord if i'm honest i think it is only now that i'm getting to a point where i really know what that means and i'm willing to say yes to it back to the disciples next week roger will be talking in more detail about what actually happened at pentecost but it is worth pointing out that the outcome of the disciples being filled after waiting was extraordinary all the way through acts of the apostles it says things like

acts 2 for we are all witnesses we are witnesses of this

acts 4 we cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard we are witnesses of these things

acts 5 we are witnesses of everything he did

again and again a voice that goes out and out and out powerfully witnessing to the presence of jesus in the real world something happened to them because they waited and the holy spirit came it actually made a difference

let me read to you a commentary by a guy called jay stalker who was talking about this

no one will have power with men who has not power with god for men under the energizing influence of the holy spirit the global harvest force jesus had initiated through his selection and discipling of the twelve broke forth as a visible movement gaining momentum at breathtaking speed in response to simon peter's anointing anointed message on the day of pentecost about 3 000 new believers were won and god kept on adding to them every day quite soon the number of men who had decided to follow jesus christ soared to approximately 5 000

you can read that in acts 4.

the movement called the way as it became known broadened further in jerusalem acts 5 and 6 spilled over into judea samaria as well as galilee acts 9 and spread to damascus acts 9 19 phoenicia cyprus and then antioch and it was there that christ's disciples were first called christians

something happened that just went rippling in all directions but first they had to wait michelle's already tried out our feelings in terms of how we gauge waiting times how are you at waiting i have a picture that i want you to have in your own mind for a moment and it's a picture of an athlete a sprinter on the starting blocks they've shaken themselves down they've positioned their hands down they've got their legs in the blocks they're all all crouched down and their head is looking down their track and they're waiting but they're not going anywhere yet they're primed they're ready but they're not going to go until the pistol fires

the disciples were trained they were ready they were already excited and inspired by the fact that he'd risen from the dead you see even though at his crucifixion or what his arrest and crucifixion they'd scattered and they were afraid now between resurrection and ascension they were different to that they'd had 40 days with the risen jesus i mean imagine that they were feeling confident that this could work but even they had to wait because they weren't empowered

so where are you do you feel trained do you know a sense of power or powerlessness instead all of this all of this process for us as a local church is jesus rewriting our tapes retraining us causing us to think in different ways and increasingly setting before us new possibilities for myself that is what lockdown has given me the possibility of new things and yet jesus is saying wait why is this so necessary why is waiting so vital in the christian life why is waiting part of the process

waiting requires us to lay down control waiting raises our appetite to not be in control but to see the holy spirit be in charge instead waiting comes out of a refusal to budge until we're truly led in a way that we can say i categorically know this

back in 2017 jane mullaney came and visited me and sat down and had a chat with me and she said i want to share a word that i think is from god and it's for you andrew and she made reference to mooses in the wilderness leading the people of israel and she described that scenario that they had where they had the tent of meeting and they had the pillar of cloud during the day in the pillar of fire during night and wherever the cloud was they would up stakes and move and follow and jane said to me this is this is several years ago she said andrew i think you need to be that kind of leader for our kind of church where you camp out waiting for the presence of god and you don't move until the presence moves and at the time it really hit me it felt like a real message from god and here in 2021 it feels like this is the moment to learn how to actually do that

a period of waiting makes us ready for what god needs to do not through us but in us in the first instance last week val was talking about wilderness and i have to admit that quite a lot of the waiting that i've had to do in my life is to do with a transformation of my struggles and my impatience and my inability to understand and my desire to be in charge and in the wilderness and in the struggles god gradually strips away that self-reliance that we all are prone to and gradually day by day week by week month by month my appetite for waiting has risen waiting on god because he can do my life better than i can do my life

how are you at tasting and understanding your own emptiness my guess is it's a common experience to fill our heads and lives with distractions when life is tough for me it could be chocolate or pork pies or tv or the internet or whatever if i'm feeling low i will cloud or clutter my head with things to take away the sense of loss or confusion or upset but there's also part of me that is

actually learning to stay still long enough to realize maybe those moments of loss maybe those moments of struggle are where there is room for god to do something deeper in me leaving the chocolates alone leaving the tv alone being quieter for longer tasting the emptiness more fully naming the hunger for what it really is and actually naming inadequacy

one of the things that is i think a cultural fact in a town like kennel worth is that we're quite often a room full of competent people who can pay our bills most of us who've got qualifications who can hold down jobs we're able and yet when it comes to us and god that's a problem when it comes to us and god

that's a weakness not a strength naming and recognizing inadequacy is a key feature that emerges out of a period of waiting waiting not for our own ideas to kick in not waiting for our our solutions to come from our own strengths but waiting for almighty god himself to do something that we can't do

let me read to you another passage this is earlier in one of the gospels matthew chapter 9 verses 14 to 17. this is fascinating it says this then

john's disciples came and asked him how is it that we and the pharisees fast often but your disciples do not fast jesus answered how can the guests of the bridegroom mourn while he is with them the time will come when the bridegroom will be taken from them and then they will fast no one sews a patch of unshrunk cloth onto an old garment for the patch will pull away from the garment making the tear worse neither do people pour new wine into old wineskins if they do the skins will burst the wine will run out and the wineskins will be ruined no they pour new wine into new wineskins and both are preserved

jesus was being quizzed on the religious behavior of his followers and he's saying while i'm here it's party time while i'm here everything works because they're following the empowered one but when i'm not here you're absolutely right they'll fast

this gave me a little window into what the disciples were probably doing for those 10 days between jesus ascension and pentecost they were feeling the loss of the bridegroom they were feeling the loss of the one who they loved and knew his love for them and suddenly they were without him empty inadequate longing for his return

isn't it fascinating in that passage jesus ties that longing to new wine and new wineskins you can't receive if you're filled with other things if you've been used before in another way you have to be completely starting from scratch with god and waiting for the new wine to come

how can i persuade you that this is something to walk towards what are the benefits of waiting on god well we know the famous passage in isaiah isaiah 40 verse 31 it says this

they that wait upon the lord shall renew their strength they shall mount up with wings as eagles they shall run and not be weary and they shall walk and not faint

that line has kind of turned into a fridge magnet or a bumper sticker or something you have on a saver screen on your computer but it is so fundamental those that wait on the lord it's a characteristic of followers if you lay down control you begin to submit to god properly that's key that's the first thing if you lay down control and wait you begin the journey of properly submitting to god which is it's room 101 it's the first basic for christians

the second thing benefits about waiting when you're waiting you recognize that you're not god and god is god when you're waiting and you're doing nothing you realize the universe is carrying on without you god is god you only know that in a period of extended waiting when you're passive because you're waiting there is space made inside of you for god to act

how many of us are so continuously active and active with no gaps with a full diary with no space and god can't get near us and god can't change us and god can't adapt anything in us and god can't modify anything and god can't change anything fundamentally because we're never still

if we are passive truly consciously on purpose passive waiting for god he can do things in us deeply that can't happen when we're active and just the fourth point when we're waiting we actually get to know god better

i don't know about you that's kind of what i live for i would i would think my life would be meaningless if i couldn't know god better waiting makes room to get know god better

so this period of time that we're getting ready for as we come back to church is to wait for god to wait for almighty god to come and meet with us and to do things that he chooses to do where our own agendas are laid down

why have the leaders of this service in this church come to this conclusion i can only speak for myself but it is a common theme that we've all arrived at i'm longing and missing the jesus who can change the world

i'm just trying to get for a moment into the head of the 12 disciples after his ascension and they're staring up at the sky and the angels say he's going to come back don't worry but go and wait for now and they go back and they sit and they stroll and they walk and they twiddle their thumbs and they pray and they fast and they sit and they wait and the days go by and they long for jesus to be back they long for jesus to be with them because that was all they lived for to be with him and for him to lead them

i want to be honest with you i miss him in that way i miss him i long for him in that way i am weary of a shallow christian life that simply copes with jesus making me feel a bit better to get through my days i want more than that and i read in the gospel that acts that there is more than that i miss him

there's another dynamic that i was thinking about with the 12 being instructed by jesus to go back to jerusalem and wait and then there's this reference to 120 who gathered with them it's not a completely different number to the people who have often gathered here in this space in this building can you imagine the 120 meeting with the 12 and the chip 12 saying we're not doing anything for a while we're going to wait we're just going to stop we're going to stop what we've normally been doing because jesus told us to wait and to wait on the presents coming

what would the 120 do
are we nearly there yet how long is this going to last but what's it for and why are we doing it
and the 12 would say we're just going to wait we're going to wait like jesus told us to

this is going to be transformative to everyone who engages with it it may feel like wilderness but that's not bad it may feel like a waste of time but that might be good it may feel far too passive when your whole life is normally utterly active that will be great i'm determined that we will wait until god comes we as leaders are determined we're praying about it we're seeking god for this and our commitment is to wait until god begins to shape us and transformers and leaders and do work in us that only god can do

so my heart's desire for you and for me as we head into these weeks of a different kind of church experience is to be of one mind would you enter into this with us enter into this with me this is a call to wait for jesus by his holy spirit to come perhaps in a way that we've never seen before it's nothing to do with style preferences it's all to do with jesus himself coming and then the making of disciples like he wants us to do it

so let me finish there with some prayers let's pray

lord jesus this feels very odd
it feels very strange it feels like walking into unknown territory
but then again that's what the twelve went through
they said goodbye to you and they waited
lord jesus my heart's desire for me for this local church
is that we wholeheartedly enter into a period of waiting
waiting for you
longing for you being changed by you
so that whatever needs to be done can be done in us and eventually through us
so holy spirit um be the leader
of this church
in jesus name amen

we're just going to have a very brief video now this just gives you a moment to
let some of that sink in

[Music: instrumental]

[Music: Holy Spirit by Bryan and Katie Torwalt]

[Michelle:]

so we're gonna carry on um with intercessions

i tend to try and kind of work out in the world and then work my way back in
again to kind of help focus my prayers on my mind um

so yeah father god i want to bring to you the situation in israel and gaza right
now lord i don't get all the ins and outs of it i don't understand everything
that's going on but i see destruction and i see death and i see civil war going
on i see all the horrific stuff going on and i hear the names of places in the
bible that i know like nazareth and jerusalem and israel and god my heart breaks
lord will you bring your peace to that place
lord will you intervene in everything that's going on
would you protect people would you protect the innocent
i don't know what the best way to pray
is but lord i know that you know what the best thing is i know that you know the
best thing for that area for you know what needs to be said you know what needs
to be done so god would you do it now
jesus would you come alongside those people
would you walk alongside them would you hold them
would you take care of them
put your loving arms around them
lord intervene in that situation
amen

and father when i think of the uk and the stuff that's going on at the moment
with the indian variant of covid spreading lords again i don't know why that's
happening i don't know what's going on and lord i really don't want things to go
back to the way that they were with restrictions so god would you intervene
thank you lord that we have got vaccines
thank you that more and more people are being vaccinated and that will put a
stop to this
but god would you intervene right now and stop this variant from spreading
thank you lord that we are able to have the restrictions relaxed a bit
thank you that i get to go and hug my family properly from monday
thank you that i can spend time with more people that are groups can meet
together again in gardens
thank you that you have moved in that situation
but god yeah would you stop this indian variant
would you stop the kent very would you stop it
oh lord would you intervene
amen

and then lord for um for our church at the moment for the young people in our church i want to pray for them lord because they're still going through gcse's and they're still going through a levels and all the stress that is tied up in that there's the teachers that are having to do more work to mark those exams and do all that extra work that they've never had to do before
lord would you help those people now
would you draw alongside the young people of our church
would you draw alongside the teachers in our church
would you give them their strength
would you give them peace lord

i'm gonna finish now with a blessing um it's the one from lectio 365. i really do like lectio 365. i highly recommend it um so their blessing from that

may this day bring sabbath rest to my heart and my home
may god's image in me be restored and my imagination in god be restored
may the gravity of material things be lightened and the relativity of time slow down
may i know grace to embrace my own finite smallness in the arms of god's infinite greatness
may god's word feed me and his spirit lead me into the week and into the life to come
amen

so um in a minute we're going to finish with our final song of the blessing um but beforehand i just wanted to remind you about the eventbrite tickets and please do sign up for tickets just two weeks of the four um if you don't have internet access get in touch with denise and she has some spare tickets put aside for people you can't get or who struggle with signing up for those um so yeah please sign up for those and it'll be great to see you back in person in a few weeks um yeah so to our final song

[Music: The Blessing]