

## **Waiting and Trusting**

“Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised.”

Waiting has always been an important aspect of life for men and women of faith. It's a theme that is often thought about during Advent, the run up to Christmas. At that time we are reminded of the long wait for the promises of the coming Messiah which were eventually fulfilled in the coming of Jesus. And yet even that great event did not bring an end to the waiting.

Even after the resurrection the disciples still didn't grasp what the Kingdom of God was really about. We see them asking Jesus at verse 6, “Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?” They still thought of the kingdom in worldly terms and were expecting Jesus to overthrow the Romans who had conquered their country.

Jesus had certainly taught them plenty about the kingdom of God right from the beginning of his ministry. He told the Pharisees, “The kingdom of God does not come with your careful observation... because the kingdom of God is within you.” (Luke 17:20,21) When Pilate asked him, “Are you the king of the Jews?” he responded, “My kingdom is not of this world. If it were, my servants would fight to prevent my arrest by the Jews. But now my kingdom is from another place.” (John 18:33,36)

The disciples had to learn that the kingdom of God had both now and not yet elements about it. It was about the rule of God in their lives, and their call to live in obedience to him irrespective of who was in power in the natural realm. However, the kingdom of God also anticipates a complete fulfilment when God's reign will be made known and everything will be seen to be subject to him.

The disciples were keen for Jesus just to get on with things, and bring in the fullness of the kingdom straight away. They had to learn to wait. Initially they had to wait for the coming of the promised Holy Spirit to empower them to live out the lives to which Jesus had called them, but beyond that there was still going to be a much longer wait for the complete fulfilment.

When we read some of Paul's letters we can see that the early believers expected that to happen within their own life time. They certainly never imagined that nearly 2,000 years later we would still be waiting. Just last week one of the members at Riccarton was asking me why I thought Jesus was taking so long to come back. When there are so many dreadful things happening in the world today and so much suffering, why doesn't he come back and take full control of things, establishing his kingship and righting all wrongs.

That's a good question that has troubled a lot of people. Even if it is not asked in terms of Jesus' return they still want to know why God doesn't intervene and sort things out. For some the conclusion that they can draw is that God is either not able or that he doesn't care, or that he is not even there. I don't think that we will ever get a fully satisfactory answer this side of eternity, but I pointed the person asking to 2 Peter chapter 3, which we read this morning: “But do not forget this one thing, dear friends: With the Lord a

day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day. The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.” I know that the reasons are far more complex than that, but that at least gives us some insight.

Sometimes it does appear that things are totally out of control. There is no doubt that we live in times of great political upheaval and uncertainty. I’m sure that if I didn’t have confidence in God to do what he has said he will do that I would be very fearful for the future. I think that it is vital that we have at least a basic understanding of how he has worked throughout history so that we can wait on him, trusting that he is still in control and that he will do what is right, even though we don’t understand, even though we would do it differently.

That is also true at a personal level. Sometimes things happen in our lives to make us question if God really knows what he is doing, if he really cares about us, or if he can be trusted with our lives.

David Smallbone felt God leading him to promote Christian concerts in his homeland, Australia, where only 5 percent of the people believed in Christ. When too few fans filled his seats during one major tour, however, David took a huge financial loss. Creditors repossessed his home, and the father of six looked for work elsewhere.

A top artist offered him a job in Nashville, so the Smallbones sold their furniture and other possessions and purchased tickets to the United States.

A few weeks after they arrived, however, David was informed that his position was "no longer available." He literally could not get out of bed for several days. When he and his wife explained to their children what happened, they all got on their knees and asked God to help them.

The Smallbones slept on bundled laundry on the floor, the same place they shared daily prayer. Interesting things began to happen. God provided bags of groceries, a minivan, and odd jobs. David Smallbone was still unemployed when the birth of his seventh child was imminent. Mother Helen Smallbone had yet to have an ultrasound, and the family had no way to pay for her to give birth in a hospital. However someone, and they don’t know who, paid the hospital bill for the delivery.

Then the biggest surprise of all - a recording contract for David’s oldest daughter, Rebecca, age 15. She recorded her first album using an old family name, St. James.

David went on to promote his own daughter’s sold-out concerts. Rebecca St. James became a well known Christian singer in America and grew into an influential music ministry. Her younger brothers Joel and Luke later formed a Christian rock duo, *For King and Country*. In 2011 the magazine *American Songwriter* described them as “Australia’s answer to *Coldplay*”

That’s a particularly dramatic story. Most of us are unlikely to find ourselves facing such desperate situations. However we do all face difficulties at some time or another. I’ve seen so many people question their faith, and even turn away from God when things don’t turn out as they think they should. Can you imagine what it must have been like for David Smallbone? Sometimes when

we get into a mess it is because of our own stupidity, but here was a man who did his best to honour God and be obedient to his call. It would have been so easy to become angry with God or resentful towards him. "I've done all this for you, and this is how you reward me! I've had enough!" It wasn't easy for him. He has said, "Helen will tell you she felt protected, but I think I shook in my boots for two to three years." Despite shaking in his boots he was somehow able to hold onto God, to wait on him and to trust him to work things out for good.

I may appear to have wandered a bit from the biblical text, but I do feel that what I've said this morning does develop practical applications of the principles that the disciples had to learn about trusting and waiting. Are you struggling with a difficult situation just now? Are you finding difficulty in making sense of it? Are you puzzled about where God fits into the picture? The disciples learned that although they didn't necessarily understand everything, although some things didn't seem to make sense, God was dependable. They learnt to wait and to trust.

That's a good thought for us to focus on as we approach communion, and as we remember Jesus death on the cross for us. To outward appearances it looked as if his mission had been an absolute failure. His enemies had got the better of him. He was utterly defeated. However, even as he died he knew that that was not the end of the story. He was able to wait on his heavenly Father, trusting in him, as he uttered those words, "Father, into your hands I commit my Spirit." Are we able to commit ourselves into our heavenly Father's hands no matter what our outward circumstances are telling us?