

Wait...

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Acts 1¹⁻⁵ / 1 Sam 13¹⁻¹⁵ / Ps 46^{10,11}

A great lesson can be learned from the story of planting of the tree called the Chinese bamboo tree. The Chinese bamboo has a quite unique growth habit. When this bamboo is planted, watered, and nurtured for the whole growing season, nothing happens; it doesn't sprout, it doesn't grow at all. Then, in the next growing season, the farmer must continue to irrigate, fertilize and care for the bamboo tree and yet nothing happens – it fails to sprout just the same. And as the seasons come and go the farmer has to continue caring for the bamboo for four consecutive years. How discouraging this must be for the farmer who, after four lonely years of hard work and caring, has nothing to show for his work!

And then on the fifth year something quite amazing and incredible happens! At last the seed sprouts grows and not just as we normally see with other plants. The bamboo tree shoots up to more than 80 to 90 feet all in 6-8 weeks!

The key, of course, to the production of this tree is... to wait! Imagine if the farmer who planted the seeds gave up after a year, two years, 4 years... Imagine if that farmer decided to plough up the field in which he'd planted the seed and start a new crop. Imagine if after 2 or 3 or even 4 years he decided to do that. All that time, for nothing. All that effort, for nothing. And yet just a little more waiting, a little

more patience and this remarkable plant in 6 short weeks will grow 80 to 90 feet.

God calls us to such patience, with each other first but also and perhaps more importantly, with the world. This is God's way with us. God calls us to wait as He works deep underground in the hearts and minds of those He is preparing to sprout and grow with enormous energy and vitality? This is, I believe, the key technique in living the Christian life. We must learn to wait. Are you prepared to do so? Are you prepared to continue caring, nurturing, watering, doing whatever God asks of you while little fruit appears above ground?

Jesus laboured for years without much apparent fruit. Within a few short days we see in Acts an enormous growth of the Church. The seed had struck and the shoot grew. Thousands were added to the Church.

The Church then laboured for a couple of hundred years within an Empire that considered it to be unholy and ungodly. Christians were called pagans and irreligious because of their belief in One God. They were ill-treated, despised, jailed, enslaved and fed to the Lions within the dreadful Roman coliseums. They were martyred in their hundreds in the most gruesome of ways. And then, in 364 the Christian faith was made the faith of the Roman Empire and suddenly the Church grew like never before.

This is the way of the Spirit. Deep work, unseen, undergrounds for years and then a sudden release of growth and the Church becomes visible and incredibly active. But it must be prepared to take note of that special word.

This word is the key post resurrection word – the word for today especially, a week after Jesus is Risen. This is the word for us, for we who live in the post-resurrection world. And what is that word? The word is **WAIT!**

As I waited for you and continue to wait for you, says the Lord, so you must wait for each other and, indeed, for those who are yet to recognise my love for them. You must also be prepared to wait **for yourself** for I am also doing a deep work in you and that must mature before you can grow for me. **For only if you wait will you reap the harvest I have carefully tended all these years.**

Only if you wait will you come into the joy of the harvesters which I have intended you have.

Only if we wait will we encounter the deep satisfaction of having obeyed God and fulfilled our calling as Christians.

Only if we wait will we come into the deep fellowship with the God who waits which comes only as you learn to wait with God.

The first and perhaps greatest skill of the Christian post Easter is to wait. This, at least, is what Luke refers to at the beginning of Acts as the beginning of the work of the Church.

⁴While staying with them, he ordered them not to leave Jerusalem, but to wait there for the promise of the Father. (Acts 1)

Now we could argue that the great commission – ‘**Go into all the world and make disciples in every nation...**’ is our substantive instruction post resurrection but always the question must be raised

as to how this is to be achieved. Now yes, some will say that 'Go' is where we must start and yes that is a part of it but again I ask – where does our going start? Where shall we go to? When shall we go? How shall we go? So many questions are anticipated by 'Go' that we must assume a more fundamental starting place for Christian mission and this friends is it.

Wait! Until I begin a work in you. **Wait!** Until you are clear about what I am saying to you. **Wait!** Until you are ready to go.

More than anything else waiting defines who Christ is to us and who we are as Christians now that Easter has come and gone for the work Christ has accomplished on the Cross means first and foremost that we don't have to work to please God for God in Christ and through Christ is already pleased to dwell with us.

But Richard that has to be nonsense since we are all still people who are bad occasionally so surely we have to try to be better, to be good?

No! Not for God. You can't make God love you any more by being good and though our sin and foolishness is a grief to God and even more so to those around us and to ourselves it doesn't make a difference to how much God loves us.

Christ is now 'all in all' as Paul would say and so our task is to let Christ be 'all in all' and that begins with waiting for Him. We then are His 'waiting creatures' – the first-fruits who wait on Christ in our own lives and for the world.

How then shall we wait? In what way do we wait for Christ?

1. Waiting for God.

Our first and most basic duty in the Christian life is to wait for God. This is perhaps the most important and basic form of waiting and to this end waiting is about hearing. We cannot and will not hear God unless we find a way of stilling ourselves and of giving God's voice a chance to be heard over and above the noise and clatter of our daily life. Early Christianity discovered this and realised that we needed a pattern of living which built waiting into it in order to grow as Christians but our Jewish brothers and sisters knew this also for they often repeated to themselves the virtues of waiting for God...

**¹³I am like the deaf, who cannot hear,
like the mute, who cannot speak;**

**¹⁴I have become like one who does not hear,
whose mouth can offer no reply.**

¹⁵LORD, I wait for you; (Ps 38)

They built this waiting, however, into the pattern of their life so that it would become a regular part of their lifestyle. David will say then that...

**‘¹⁷ Evening and morning and at noon, will I pray, and cry aloud:
and he shall hear my voice.’**

And Daniel incorporated a similar practice into his daily life. The Church found that this became even more effective when you were able to build larger blocks of time into our life to wait for God so ‘retreats’ became an important way of growing more sensitive to the Word of God and these could include a day or a weekend or a week or even longer periods where people would

leave their usual life pattern and go away to simply **wait** for God. If we want to mature in Christ we too need to give ourselves to waiting in this way.

2. Waiting in response to evil – we face some enormous evils in the world – a result, if you like of evil piled up against evil and it's not something that individual action can ameliorate. Some evil requires a response but other evil, 'big evil' simply confuses and depresses us. In the first instance the biblical response to such evil is to wait on God – to know that somehow God can and will use this evil to achieve something better and so to press in to God both to hear Him better and to understand what we might do.

Jesus waited in response to evil. He let Judas continue as a disciple despite knowing what he was up to and knowing what he would eventually do. He knew Peter would betray him and even told him so but He didn't do anything to stop it. Jesus also knew what He would have to suffer and though He didn't like it He also knew that this was God's plan to defeat evil finally.

The opposite of waiting is either to throw ourselves and our personal resources against such evil and to become another victim of it or to lose hope completely and to run both from it and from God.

We, in this culture, like the idea of an individual pitting themselves against overwhelming evil and indeed much popular literature is based around such a heroic storyline. What is clear, I believe, from history, is that unless we are absolutely

convinced this is God's will for us a better way forward is to unite against evil – to find common cause against a common enemy and to fight together. Knee jerk reactions to evil are seldom what God requires of us. Better to lose a few battles and still be fighting the war than to lose all and have no further ability to fight the war.

The first thing that shooting back at someone who has shot at you confirms is that you are pretty much the same as he.

3. Waiting in response to the 'good.' We have many good options, many good things we can do and often should do but the good is often not the best. Psychologists have pointed out for many years now how in a dysfunctional system the prime movers are people who want to do the good. These are the wives, husbands, daughters and sons who cover over an addict's abusive behaviour by covering up for it and by covering it over. And in tidying up after their abusive relative or friend's behaviour they actually make it worse. We used to think that by spreading DDT dust over vast areas of Africa to kill the mosquito that spread malaria we were doing a 'good' thing. Turns out that because DDT does not break down once released in to the environment what we were really doing was poisoning the environment. The **'good'** was certainly not the best.

Perhaps the most poignant tale of not waiting in the Bible is that read to us this morning – the story of Saul's refusal to wait for Samuel to offer sacrifice's in preparation for battle with the Philistines. This was an incredibly important part of preparation for battle for Israel since this action determined that God would

be on their side and when, after 7 days waiting, Samuel didn't turn up Saul decided to '**get the job done**' and do it himself. After all, Israel needed the assurance of God's presence with them and in the end he, Saul, was King so couldn't he offer the sacrifice? Wasn't it a good thing to do so?

What is at stake here with Saul is what is at stake whenever we decide to do some good in order to fix something and that is what we believe about our ability to **be good**. You see when I spread DDT all over the New Zealand countryside to destroy the grass grub which is ruining pasture and costing farmers lots of money my definition of '**good**' is only as good as the breadth of my vision. What I don't know in the 60's (when this practice was in full force) is that because of the lack of breakdown of DDT and the fact that it gets into the meat and milk products grown on that land for years afterwards and can be detected by buyers of such. Furthermore, dairying will never be able to be carried out on that land and it may well, in the future, not be able to be used for meat production.

All our notions of good have this vital limitation – we cannot see that well to make a good judgment of what is good. As Jesus said, 'Only God is good.' By which he meant – only God can really see what is good. (Can you see what I mean?)

What is the answer? The Christian answer is to **wait** and then to walk very humbly in what we think is good because we cannot rely on our own conceptions of what is good. We must hold everything lightly and be ready to repent of our goodness in a flash for who knows, our good thing and especially our very

good thing may well have a fatal flaw just as the practice of spreading DDT on Kiwi land did.

Speaking about the cult of progress G K Chesterton once wrote this...

“The modern world is a crowd of very rapid racing cars all brought to a standstill and stuck in a block of traffic.”

We too, if we refuse to wait on God will end up wasting what we can do in to do what we think should be done.

Is God in our doing? That’s the question for this week. Is God in our doing? The only way to be sure is to learn to... **WAIT!**