

A Sermon for Pentecost 2021

By the Rev. Jackie Bullen

In the Name of the living God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

Do you enjoy travelling by train?

It is something I enjoy very much but don't do as often as I would like. When I'm on the platform of a railway station, I like to look around at the place and particularly the people.

Standing and watching, you can see a variety of people, some heading to or from work, going shopping, or hoping to arrive at another destination later, and more often than not they look bored!

They may be reading an actual newspaper, or most often these days using some sort of device to keep themselves occupied. No-one seems to be talking to anyone else, or if they are, it's rare and most likely only because they are travelling with family, friends, or perhaps someone they work with, but invariably they will already know the person. It's the concept of waiting at its most obvious.

By contrast, I had the opportunity to see a video posted to YouTube of a little girl called Madeline. The link for that video was on yesterday's Pew News. I suggest you take a look at it if possible. It's such a wonderful short video, and I wish I could show it to you now, as Madeline's face and reactions would say everything that needs to be said today on this feast of Pentecost.

Instead I will try to describe it to you.

Madeline, for her third birthday, asked her parents if she could take a journey on a train and the video shows her waiting at the platform as the train arrives. But Madeline is not like those bored adults I mentioned earlier. She is waiting for the train in the very best spirit of waiting.

Her eyes are virtually popping out of her head. She's jiggling up and down with excitement, 'Here it comes' she says 'here it comes'... 'Look how close it is to us' she says 'Oh my goodness'. Her mouth wide open when the train finally rolls into the station.

She is full of awe and wonder, and her enthusiasm not only makes you smile, but draws you into the array of emotions she is feeling. It's absolutely adorable, and it's no wonder that a short, amateur, 42 second video has racked up over 12 and a half million hits!

These first moments, first experiences, in anyone's life are precious, and they become etched into our memories as significant events in our life, but as we grow older we sometimes forget how amazing these things were, and it can sometimes be the same in our faith.

We all remember celebrating the resurrection, but we sometimes forget the preciousness of the following 40 days where Jesus spent time with his disciples, teaching, training, appearing to them.

But we also remember that when he left, he told his disciples ... to wait.

We don't know how those apostles waited. We don't know whether they even understood what they were waiting for. But on the Day of Pentecost, St Luke writes in the Acts of the Apostles, that:

'suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability.'

Why? Well tongues have a purpose, they can be used for good or harm as we are all very much aware, but on this day, it was most definitely for good. They received the Holy Spirit and were then blown forth into the world, beginning in Jerusalem, which was busy for the Pentecost Festival, originally a Jewish festival to celebrate the harvest, and these tongues, this gift, this boldness, this power in the disciples, was given to them with a specific purpose.

By the end of that day a total of 3,000 people from all over the known world at that time had heard the gospel, the good news in their own language, and as a result, gave their lives to Christ and became followers of the way.

These new followers heralded the establishment of the Church worldwide on that day in Jerusalem, the time of waiting was now over.

Luke tells us of how they returned to Jerusalem worshipping him with great Joy, and they stayed there in the temple praising God and waiting for the gift they would receive at Pentecost. But what Luke doesn't tell us is how they waited.

It is likely that their waiting was filled with trepidation - how long do we wait? What will happen next? Given the rollercoaster they had been on since Maundy Thursday, there would no doubt be a range of emotions.

However, if they had understood what was about to happen, I think they would have been waiting in eager anticipation, just like Madeline and with wonder and expectation, the opposite of how many adults tend to wait.

As we worship today, I wonder how you feel this morning.

Are you filled with a sense of duty, or was it with expectation of how, through hearing the Gospel message, we would be challenged to live our lives fully?

Being part of a church family is not the equivalent of sitting around in a holy waiting room, waiting for our number to be called, while listening to the preacher, and waiting for us to be taken to the Kingdom away from this world so that the excitement can begin.

We are not merely here waiting to die, but here because we are charged with living the resurrection life as an Easter people. As followers of a Messiah who died and then rose to life in this world we need to realise that it's not all about what happens in heaven, the action is down here on Earth.

The adventure that God calls us to, continues right here, right now, as we come to worship, to be filled up and re-fuelled.

This in turn enables us to live the resurrection life right here, right now. In the midst of this old, wounded and broken world.

We are re-fuelled and ready to go, so that we can go back into the world each week and spread our joy and enthusiasm as we go.

So today ask yourself, are you waiting like Madeline or like those other people at the railway station?

Has our waiting become passive, bored and disconnected, or are we there eager and ready to take up the challenges ahead of us, eager like the apostles and St Paul to go out and share the love and grace that we have each received, to share Christ with our community, our families, our friends?

We need to be active in our waiting and expectant. We need to ask God to be involved in our lives each and every day. Whether that is asking for help for ourselves, others, or perhaps those who we have never, or will never meet.

To remind us that we are family, and we all have our own unique skills and gifts which we can use in our own lives as well as for others, and that we need to continually be asking for Him to guide and forgive us.

Finally, we need to always remember that at the heart of all of our prayer is that great and dangerous prayer of trust – Your Will be done.

As we wait in expectation, we continue to bind the threads of our lives, into one great tapestry with all who believe in the amazing grace and love of God and we go out into a world which needs to know God for itself to join in God's great mission to his world, his people.

All of this is part the great gift of Pentecost that as the Holy Spirit descended upon the church with power from on high, the offering of this gift wasn't intended just for those who immediately received, but that it must be passed from person to person until the whole world has heard the good news.

It is up to each of us how we will use the gifts that we have received, will we continue to weave our story into his story? Our threads into his cords of love? Not bored, and not distracting ourselves with other things - the equivalent of sticking the headphones in our ears at the train station.

I believe God wants us to be like Madeline with that pure wonder and awe. Always eager to see the things of God, excited and wide eyed in prayer, and action, full of expectation as we wait and open ourselves to the wonders that are around us each and every day.

Amen.