

Year A, Easter 7 17th May 2026

Acts 1: 6-14. 1 Peter 4: 12-14. John 17:1-11.

The seventh Sunday of Easter is one of those in-between weeks in our Lectionary and liturgical calendar.

On Thursday this last week, we celebrated the forty days since the resurrection of Jesus, his ascension to heaven and Jesus' assurance that the followers of Jesus would soon gain an Advocate, what we now call the Holy Spirit.

It isn't until next Sunday that we celebrate the Feast of Pentecost, fifty days after the resurrection, when the Holy Spirit will descend on the apostles and other believers, in Jerusalem, like tongues of fire.

So, we are in between times. But this is not a week to rest and think nothing important is happening. For like many in-between times, it is in these times that the stirrings or change are happening, or when other preparations are being made.

This morning I am going to focus on our reading from Acts. The very first chapter that we heard read to us this morning. The risen Jesus was with the disciples, and according to Luke's account, over the previous forty days the disciples had been given an intensive tutorial by Jesus on the kingdom of heaven. Immediately before the passage we read today Jesus tells the disciples that the Holy Spirit will baptize them in a few days' time.

The disciples, being knowledgeable about Hebrew Scriptures asked Jesus "Lord, is this the time when you will restore the kingdom to Israel?" Jesus' response can appear a bit rude and a case of shutting down what could be seen as a very legitimate line of enquiry by those who had been with him for three years. The disciples were

eager to know how long it would be before the Messiah came in glory.

Jesus responded, "It is not for you to know the times and periods that the Father has set by his own authority." Well, that told them!

So, what prompted the question and response, I wonder?

Here is my attempt to answer the question.

The disciples, despite having received Jesus' attention over the last forty days and learnt more about the nature of the kingdom of heaven, were still thinking in very human terms. We all like to plan, to have some certainty in our lives, to be prepared for future events, as best we can. We feel most secure when our diary has things planned and entered in to it. If you are like me, to have an event in mind, but not yet knowing when it will happen can be unsettling.

Hence, the very human question from the disciples... "Lord, is this the time when you will restore the kingdom to Israel?"

However, the disciples had not been the very best of learners. They had not, or perhaps could not, put themselves into the timeframe and time scales of God. It is a bit like me watching some video clips on YouTube of a lady who calls herself the 'Scottish Geologist'. She talks about millions of years, and occasionally about billions of years, to describe the events that formed the rock she is standing on. Or listening to Prof Brian Cox (physicist, not the actor) and Neil Degrasse Tyson talking about the cosmos and the billions and trillions of planets and such enormous distances measured in millions and billions of light years that there is no way I can grapple with the size or measurements.

And maybe, it is important that no-one can know the answer to their question. Because, it should stop people from saying that they have the answer, God has told them that the Messiah will be coming on 28th March 2027 in West Linton, or wherever! That is the way of cult leaders, mostly abusers of people who have a genuine desire to know when the Messiah will come.

Jesus response to the disciples, does not offer them a set date and time. God's time is not our time. What Jesus offers is something that strangely, I think is better:

- ✝ Humbly accept that you will not know the time and nature of the coming of the Messiah.
- ✝ Receive with joy the Holy Spirit that will come upon you.
- ✝ Be an active witness to the nature of God, guided by the Holy Spirit.

We are the inheritors of the work of the those first apostles, baptised by the Holy Spirit. We are also called to receive the Holy Spirit and be active witnesses to the nature of God, to the people around us each and every day.

A witness is someone who knows 'the story', in this instance, of the example of Jesus, the Christ, and goes about living out that story, in their place, in their time. We are all part of that cloud of witnesses. We are not all called to lead a major headlining role, in fact I don't think those people are fully able to be true witnesses. We are the everyday witnesses, who are loved by God, seen by God, known by God.

The good news is that we each matter. We are witnesses, and can bring the story of God's love for all to those we come into contact with.

Ours is not to know the time or place of the Messiah's coming. That is a human reaction and a need.

We matter because we are loved by God. Our role as witnesses, is to make a difference to the lives of others, each and every day, and not to get caught up in the unproductive and frankly corrupting speculation of when the Messiah will return. For I feel more certain that we will know God's loving presence around us as we do God's work and bear faithful witness to others, than if we tried to prophesy about when the Messiah will return. Our time is not God's time.

Let us be content to be witnesses, living every day in the Holy Spirit's slipstream, and plan to continue doing that.