

Preparing for Growth

Acts 1:12-26

DT- Use the waiting well.

Today we are beginning a series looking at the life of Peter in the book of Acts. We are going to spend a lot of time in the book of Acts this year, looking at the life of both Peter and Paul. If we want the church here in Tonganoxie to grow what better place to learn from than the book that describes how the 1st century church grew. Today in Acts 1 we will see how the disciples began to prepare for growth. Let's pray and then we will get into the text.

PRAY

Life is a series of beginnings and endings, of meetings and departures. The food we buy has a shelf life. Some things can sit on the shelf for months or even years and other things only have a few days in which they can sit on the shelf before they go bad. Every place of business no matter what business it may be, has some level of turnover. People come and go. Some stay a long time, maybe their whole career but eventually they will step away.

The disciples were dealing with this reality at the beginning of Acts 1. Jesus spends 40 days with the disciples after his resurrection. They didn't know he was only going to be around for 40 days but he had told them in Acts 1:4-5, "Do not leave Jerusalem until the Father sends you the gift he promised, as I told you before. John baptized with water, but in just a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit."

Jesus was going to leave them. The end of his earthly ministry was fast approaching but it was good that he was leaving because then the Holy Spirit would be sent. The disciples didn't fully understand that in fact they ask him in verse 6 if the time has come for him to free Israel and restore the kingdom. Jesus deflects that question by telling them that only the Father knows the dates and times for things like that. Then Jesus says this in Acts 1:8, "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you. And you will be my witnesses, telling people about me everywhere—in Jerusalem, throughout Judea, in Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."

That's the great commission of Acts. Right after Jesus said that he begins to ascend into heaven. The disciples stare at him like a child who has just lost a helium balloon. Now what? There will be a 10-day period between the ascension and the Day of Pentecost. 10 days to wait for the Holy Spirit, 10 days to wonder what just happened, 10 days to doubt what they had seen and heard, 10 days to believe and be reassured of what they had seen and heard.

We are people of action, we don't like to wait. We typically want things immediately. The Holy Spirit should have just come right after Jesus ascension. Instead of angels telling them to wait after the ascension it should have been the Holy Spirit ready to fill them and begin this important work of telling people everywhere about Jesus. The gospel should be preached right away, but instead they had to wait.

What would you have done? What do you do in the midst of waiting? There are times when we have to wait for things. Sometimes we have to wait for test results. Sometimes we have to wait days for a diagnosis. Sometimes we have to wait to hear about a potential job. Sometimes we have to wait for things to be repaired or fixed. The seasons of waiting in our life can be tough. Sometimes those seasons are the hardest ones to live through. We want to do something, or we want God to do something, and when it seems like he isn't doing anything we start to wonder am I really on track with God? Am I really within his will?

You may very well be right within his will but he is asking you to wait. How you use that time of waiting, and what you do during that time of waiting matters. It mattered for the disciples. Use the waiting well.

The disciples used that 10 days to prepare themselves for growth. Often our time of waiting produces growth as well. Sometimes we recognize that during the waiting and sometimes we don't recognize it until after the period of waiting is over. For the disciples, they chose to use the waiting well to prepare themselves for the growth that they didn't even know was coming. They did several things in preparation for that growth and Peter in most cases is leading the charge.

The very first thing they did during this 10-day waiting period was practice obedience.

1. Practice obedience.

Jesus had told them back in verse 4 to stay in Jerusalem and wait for the Holy Spirit. Acts 1:12 says, "Then the apostles returned to Jerusalem from the Mount of Olives, a distance of half a mile."

They did exactly as they were told. Now you may think that was easy for them, I mean what else could they do. There were lots of things they could have done. They could have scattered back to their own homes. Gone on with their lives and the businesses they had been a part of before Jesus. Since Jesus didn't create the kingdom they thought he would they could have given up on the whole thing.

If they were thinking more spiritually they could have run out ahead of Jesus plan because there is work to do and people to evangelize. They could have thought it was pointless to wait inactively there in Jerusalem. Often we learn the most about obedience when we can't see why God is calling us to it. Perhaps he is making you wait and obey for reason.

If you're in one of those seasons right now where you just feel stuck in one spot and can't seem to move on, remember that there is value in the preparation, value in the obedience to remain where God has placed you, knowing that the action will come later. The change will happen but right now he needs you to obey and prepare yourself for that future growth that is coming. Proverbs 19:21 says, "You can make many plans, but the Lord's purpose will prevail."

Sometimes to prepare for growth we need to practice obedience while we wait for the Lord. Use the waiting well. The next thing the disciples and this small group of followers did during this period of waiting was spend time in fellowship.

2. Spend time in fellowship.

Verse 13 says they went to the upstairs room of the house where they were staying, probably the same room they had been in with Jesus. Then we get a list of all the disciples minus Judas Iscariot of course. Then Acts 1:14 tells us how they spent time in fellowship together where it says, "They all met together and were constantly united in prayer, along with Mary the mother of Jesus, several other women, and the brothers of Jesus."

It's not just the disciples who waiting and preparing for this growth but Mary is there, Jesus brothers are there, and other women who had followed Jesus during his ministry. Then in verse 15 we learn that there are even more than that waiting. Acts 1:15 says, "During this time, when about 120 believers were together in one place, Peter stood up and addressed them."

Now there's 120 total gathered together fellowshiping as they wait. Perhaps Nicodemus was there who showed such an interest in Jesus, or maybe Joseph of Arimathea who provided the tomb was there. Maybe Mary and Martha and Lazarus were there. Perhaps some of the people Jesus had healed were part of that 120. The point is we now have a small nucleus of people in this emerging church.

People need people, people need one another especially when they are in period or a season of waiting. If any church wants to grow and prepare for that growth, fellowship must be part of that preparation. We grow best intellectually, socially, and spiritually when we are around others. You don't become a Christian in isolation, you enter into a body of believers and find fellowship with them.

One of the biggest determining factors in a young person keeping and maintaining their faith in college is whether they find other Christians to fellowship with during the first few months of school starting. The people you surround yourself with, the people you fellowship with have the greatest impact on the person you will become. Who are you fellowshiping with?

I love what Solomon says in Ecclesiastes 4:9-12 about the importance of fellowship, he says, "Two people are better off than one, for they can help each other succeed. If one person falls, the other can reach out and help. But someone who falls alone is in real trouble. Likewise, two people lying close together can keep each other warm. But how can one be warm alone? A person standing alone can be attacked and defeated, but two can stand back-to-back and conquer. Three are even better, for a triple-braided cord is not easily broken."

You need to do life with others. We need to bare one another's burdens. To use the waiting well means putting people around you that can speak into your life and help you as the plan of God begins to unfold for you. This group of Christ followers were not only spending time together in fellowship but they also made it a point to spend time in prayer.

3. Spend time in prayer.

That's a theme you will see repeated over and over again in the book of Acts. Prayer is such a powerful thing. Acts 1:14 says they were "Constantly in prayer." What do you think they prayed for? I can imagine they must have praised God in their prayers for raising Christ. Perhaps there were some prayers of confession. That would seem like an important aspect of preparing for growth.

Peter had just denied Christ and although Christ had reinstated him so to speak, I can imagine some of his prayers during that 10 days were prayers of confession for that and maybe prayers of thanksgiving for the forgiveness and trust that Jesus still showed him. The others had not outright denied Jesus like Peter, but they did scatter and run and hide.

Surely in their prayers they asked for strength and faithfulness to accomplish whatever tasks was ahead of them. Prayer is one of the crucial elements to waiting well. Prayer must be part of any waiting that we do no matter how long that wait may be. Jesus told the parable of the persistent widow to help the disciples understand why they should pray in the midst of the waiting. Jesus tells that parable in Luke 18:1-8 where it says, "One day Jesus told his disciples a story to show that they should always

pray and never give up. "There was a judge in a certain city," he said, "who neither feared God nor cared about people. A widow of that city came to him repeatedly, saying, 'Give me justice in this dispute with my enemy.' The judge ignored her for a while, but finally he said to himself, 'I don't fear God or care about people, but this woman is driving me crazy. I'm going to see that she gets justice, because she is wearing me out with her constant requests!'" Then the Lord said, "Learn a lesson from this unjust judge. Even he rendered a just decision in the end. So don't you think God will surely give justice to his chosen people who cry out to him day and night? Will he keep putting them off? I tell you, he will grant justice to them quickly! But when the Son of Man returns, how many will he find on the earth who have faith?"

Will he find us faithfully praying both in the waiting and in the going? I hope that he does. Most of the major revivals throughout the time since Christ's ascension have begun first with a committed effort to prayer. We have seen this group of followers practice obedience, spend time in fellowship and spend time in prayer. It seems that they also made it a point to spend time in study as well.

4. Spend time in study.

We see this most clearly in the speech that Peter gives in Acts 1:15-20 where it says, "Peter stood up and addressed them. "Brothers," he said, "the Scriptures had to be fulfilled concerning Judas, who guided those who arrested Jesus. This was predicted long ago by the Holy Spirit, speaking through King David. Judas was one of us and shared in the ministry with us." (Judas had bought a field with the money he received for his treachery. Falling headfirst there, his body split open, spilling out all his intestines. The news of his death spread to all the people of Jerusalem, and they gave the place the Aramaic name Akeldama, which means "Field of Blood.") Peter continued, "This was written in the book of Psalms, where it says, 'Let his home become desolate, with no one living in it.' It also says, 'Let someone else take his position.'"

Obviously the disciples and perhaps the others who made up the 120 people were studying scripture and preparing themselves for what God was going to do next. In the course of their study they found 2 psalms that seemed to point towards this betrayal of Judas. Now you have to understand that for the Jews they saw history as cyclical not linear like we do sometimes. This means David was a type of Christ. He was not the Messiah but he was the anointed king. Jesus is born and he becomes the culmination of David, and Moses, and Abraham. Jesus fulfills what was written in the prophets so what David wrote in Psalm 69 and Psalm 109 were originally written about his enemies but now that Christ has come those same words are being fulfilled by Jesus in a greater way.

This is why I also say there is almost always one authors intended meaning in a text. There are some rare occasions like this where the text can have 2 meanings. One for David at the time of writing and one for Jesus who fulfills all of the law and the prophets.

Peter and the disciples were studying scripture and found that Psalm 69:25 says, "Let their homes become desolate and their tents be deserted." That's what this field of Judas was a very desolate place. Peter describes Judas's death very graphically here. Some wonder how his body fell if he hung himself from a tree.

If Judas hung himself on Friday the day of Jesus crucifixion and death, then his body would have bloated on Saturday, and perhaps when the earth shook on Sunday it caused the branch to break or the tree itself to fall and his body would have done what Peter describes. That field is still there today and it is desolate to this day as well. They spent time studying and were correct with their application of that passage.

They also found Psalm 109:8 in their studying where it says, "Let his years be few; let someone else take his position."

Judas's years certainly were few and they did fill his position. I would imagine they did even more searching than this, and spending time studying scripture is a wonderful thing to do while you wait. While we were Christmas shopping we had to wait on something for about 15 or 20 minutes, so Abby continued to shop some and I sat down to wait and got out my phone and read. Studying while they waited probably gave Peter the opportunity to read and study Joel chapter 2 which he uses to preach from on the Day of Pentecost when thousands give their life to Christ.

Studying is a vital part of waiting well. The very last thing they did during this waiting period as they prepared for growth was recognize their need for leadership and take the necessary steps to supply that need. They did that by filling the vacancy that Judas left with a man named Matthias. This process of finding his replacement reminds us that to use the waiting well we need to obey, we need to spend time in fellowship, in prayer, and in study. Doing that will help us make the right choice.

5. Make the right choice.

At some point the waiting will be over and you may be faced with a choice. If you've waited well and prepared well for growth making the right choice will be easy. Peter leads the charge in this decision. In Acts 1:21-26 Peter says, "So now we must choose a replacement for Judas from among the men who were with us the entire time we were traveling with the Lord Jesus—from the time he was baptized by John until the day he was taken from us. Whoever is chosen will join us as a witness of Jesus' resurrection." So they nominated two men: Joseph called Barsabbas (also known as Justus) and Matthias. Then they all prayed, "O Lord, you know every heart. Show us which of these men you have chosen as an apostle to replace Judas in this ministry, for he has deserted us and gone where he belongs." Then they cast lots, and Matthias was selected to become an apostle with the other eleven."

The choice was made and now the disciples are 12 once again and have prepared themselves well for the coming growth. Sometimes we long for and pray for growth. We pray that God would bless our church and convict the lost of their sin and bring many to salvation. We pray for God to send a revival, but do we think about what we would need if that kind of growth happened.

I can tell you that those times are amazing, but they are draining physically and spiritually. People want and need instruction. They want their sins dealt with and want to know how to straighten their life out. Often they don't even want to go home. So who will teach them? Who is going to pastor them? If we're serious about growth then we need to begin to prepare for it now. We must make the right choices now. In our leadership, in our key volunteers, in how we spend our time. In how we spend our money.

I believe that church is allowed to grow only to the point in which it's leadership can handle that size. These 120 people were obedient to God. They spent time in fellowship with each; time in prayer with one another; time studying the word together, and they made the right choice in the areas of leadership. All of that combined was the preparation they needed for growth. This preparation that we see in their time of waiting can be applied in so many ways, both personally as we wait but also as we wait and prepare for growth as a church body. If you aren't in a season of waiting, you will be at some point, and for those of you who are in a season of waiting learn from the disciples, learn from Peter's leadership and use the waiting well.