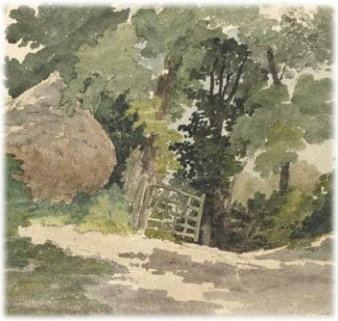

Liminal: living in the in-between #4

Forming Community in the Waiting w/c 18 May 2025

"It is when we are betwixt and between, have left one room but not yet entered the next room, any hiatus between stages of life, faith, jobs, loves, or relationships. It is that graced time when we are not certain or in control, when something genuinely new can happen … it is the ultimate teachable space." (Richard Rohr)

Read Acts 1:12–26 and Luke 24:49–53

The final verses of Luke 24 and the opening ones of Acts are Luke's two accounts of the same events. The first is much shorter but essentially they tell the same story. Following the resurrection, Jesus spends time teaching the disciples; he promises the Spirit; he commissions them, tells them to wait and then he is 'taken up into heaven'. There's a short liminal break for the church to-be[1] and then Pentecost arrives.

The waiting from Ascension to Pentecost was a one-off. It's not for us to copy. However, we are in a time when the church is navigating its way through changes brought to society. Both post-modernism and the end of Christendom impact us. How do we find our way through these times?

A key takeaway from our passage in Acts 1 is the sense of the disciples wanting to remain as a community. These are people who (by and large) had spent the last three years together. Verse 21 makes it clear that the travelling group was fairly large – see also Luke 8:2&3. In what ways is our idea of 'church' less than their experiences of being in community during that time with each other and with Jesus?

Verses 13 and 14 indicate an inner core. The next verse though is very specific as to their overall number. In Jewish law, 120 was the smallest community (of men only) that could have its own council. Luke is establishing the status of the community of Jesus. 1 Corinthians 15:6 makes it clear that there were more believers than this – over 500. The majority perhaps had already returned to homes across Judea and Galilee. How do we build community on all its levels within the church today?

Jesus' parting command to 'wait' is both one <u>for</u> something but is also to then <u>do</u> something. And that, Luke is very clear, is to be witnesses. Once *"clothed with power from on high"* they are to get on with it. They are not to worry whether they're up to it, Jesus simply says "*you are my witnesses*". Interestingly, this is not a command but rather a simple statement of fact. Similarly, as we read much of New Testament, we have to remember that that the writers are not being aspirational, they're simply telling us how it is. For instance, when read in Colossians that we are holy or have been brought into the Kingdom, Paul uses the Greek aorist tense. These are statements of things that have been completed once and for all. It's done already. Do we still (too often) feel that we need to wait – for something to 'happen'?

It is important to remember that we have received those things that the first disciples had been promised. The Holy Spirit has been given to us. We must not seek to put ourselves back into their world. How can we allow the biblical narratives to inform and help us without our overly focussing on what is past?

Take a moment to reflect on the quotation at the top of the page. When we find ourselves in a liminal space, how do we recognise when the time for teaching has ended and it's time for us to move on?

Finally, a question those first believers only had to tackle as the events following chapter one unfold, but which is valid for us today: Is our church intended for us or for those who do not yet know God?

"Change your opinions, keep to your principles; change your leaves, keep intact your roots." (Victor Hugo)

[1] You can see more of what this state of liminality means for the wider church in my article 'Liminality' in the church magazine from March 2024 (it's on page 18). If you're reading this digitally, you can find it here; alternatively, on the church website, navigate to *Connect* and then *Magazine*.