

**Laggan and Newtonmore  
Parish Church of Scotland**

**Rev. Catherine Buchan**

**26th May 2019**

**What to do when the time comes**

Psalm 107:1-9

Acts 2:1-12

We are still pursuing our theme of discipleship: how to be a disciple. Two weeks ago we asked the question “What to do when you don’t know what to do?” and we found that the answer was wait, pray and do what you know you need to do now with no excuses. Today we are seeing what to do when the time to do something comes.

The disciples had waited, they had prayed. In fact they did not have to wait too long, just about a week and a half before God made it quite clear to them that the time to do something had come: when he sent the Spirit on the day of Pentecost. That day was exciting, it was confusing, no doubt, but it was clear to these people who had been waiting and praying that it was time to be doing. And thrilled by the first touch of the Spirit, they knew what they wanted to do – they wanted to praise God and tell everyone of his marvellous deeds.

“Let the redeemed of the Lord say so” said our Psalm, and then the Psalmist goes on to talk about people who have been lost and hungry, people who have been weighed down by distress and depression, people who were sick even unto death, people who were caught in storms at sea and how God had saved each of these groups from their conditions and dangers and how they should then tell of God’s goodness and praise God’s name.

The disciples were just beginning to realise that they too were redeemed of the Lord. The significance of Jesus’ death and resurrection was something that they would understand more fully as day by day they reflected on it and worked out in practice how they were called to live because of it, but they were beginning to understand that this was a death which changed things, which meant that they – and any who believed – were given a welcome into God’s family and were able to live beyond-the-grave life in the here and now. They were the redeemed of the Lord and with the touch of God’s Spirit, the joy of this flooded them and they wanted to praise God and tell others.

So they did.

They had a great story to tell, after all. The story of Jesus, and how they met him and got to know him and what he said and did and how they found it hard to understand but how understanding grew on them and how it was all a wonderful example of the great love of

God. They had a great story to tell. It was, of course, very much the same story that we have to tell as well.

We don't have eyewitness experience of Jesus' life on earth as the first disciples did. But we have their accounts of that to rely on. The story of Jesus that we have to tell is firmly rooted in the story that the disciples told on that day of Pentecost, in Peter's sermon. Or in later tellings and preachings, or in the gospels which were written from their words. It is a wonderful story of wisdom and compassion, of new thinking – thinking that is still new today, because it is so radically different from our natural selfishness. We have the same story to tell as the disciples did that day.

But we also have our own stories of how knowing Jesus has changed our lives. One of the things that we have done a handful of times in this church – maybe three – is that I have given you the chance to get up and tell bits of your stories, of what makes you want to praise God or what knowing God has meant to you. And you have always risen to the challenge. Now, I am not going to spring such an opportunity on you today, you may be glad to know, because I don't think that springing this on people is the best way to go about doing it. But I do think we should make more space here in church worship for people to tell their stories. Apart from the encouragement it is to each other it is also good practice for telling our stories beyond the church walls.

Because when the time comes to do something, what ever form it comes in, it will include telling our praise of God and our wonder at all that he has done for us in Jesus.

The time to do something comes to us as individuals in different ways. You never know when you will have the joy of being able to say something of your faith, of what gives your life its meaning and purpose, and so it is as well to be ready. These disciples had been waiting, but not in a void. They had been praying.

When we pray, we put ourselves in the presence of God, and it is God who helps us to see the world and our own lives through his eyes. The more we pray the more our way of looking at things changes. And the better we can see what God has done and is doing for us and in our lives. I am sure that the days spent in prayer and waiting were instrumental to the disciples being ready to take the opportunity of the Day of Pentecost – a day of festival in Jerusalem when there would be lots of people around to hear their message. I am sure that in those days of prayer, the disciples were beginning to work out what it meant that Jesus was God, and that he came and live and died and rose again. They wouldn't have developed a finished theology, and anyway there is no such thing, but they would have begun to get what you might call the chapter headings in their story.

What, I wonder, are the chapter headings in your story of faith? It is an interesting exercise in prayer and reflection to spend some time thinking about this question. What are my chapter headings? Do they follow a linear story of my life? Early years, teens, twenties and so on? Or is it more thematic – answered prayers, difficulties faced, times of joy and so on? If you have a spare half hour this week, why not sit down and think about the chapter headings of your life with God. It will not be time wasted, as almost certainly it will propel you into prayers of thanks. And it will be a good preparation for the times when you get a chance to say something of your joy and gratitude to God.

That is where our story of faith should always start – with our joy and gratitude. That is where the disciples started on that day of Pentecost. They were heard “speaking about God’s deeds of power.” Too often the church has tried to begin telling the story by getting people to feel bad about themselves with talk of sin and damnation. Now, that is part of the story, but it is not where we begin. We begin with God, who is love, and who showed his love in sending Jesus. When we are telling our story we begin with our own joy, even if it has been hard won through painful circumstances.

Recently three of us were able to attend a conference in Perth called “Hope in the Rural Church.” One of the speakers there, who had come up from England, made the point that the good news of Jesus is always contextual. The bones of the story are always the same, but what makes the news good varies from person to person and place to place. And he encouraged us to think about this question: “What is it that gives you joy about being a Christian where you are?” This is slightly different than asking “What is it that gives you joy about being a Christian?” That is to do with your chapter headings. But by saying “Where you are” you are talking about a shared context, the context of where we live together. Why do you like following Jesus here? Is it what you find in the church and if so, what is that and how might it be helpful to others? Is it what you find in the village, and if so, how can you help other villagers see that parts of their community are aligned with the kingdom of God? Probably very few people think of our community in these terms!

“What is it that gives you joy about being a Christian where you are?” Another thing to think about if you have a spare half hour. Another way of preparing for the times when God shows us that it is time to act. And maybe this question is one that we should be thinking about as a church community. We are the only church meeting n Newtonmore/Laggan. If we find joy in our church, what is its source, and how might we be able to take that joy to others who need it? What opportunities is God giving us to take his praise and our good news to our community. Contextually speaking, we are the people best placed to do so! On the day of Pentecost, in order to make sense to the people in Jerusalem, the disciples had to be empowered to speak in their various languages. Here in this village that is not the gift we need, but the ability to see why being a Christian here is such good news.

When the time comes to do something, and that time comes more frequently than we sometimes realise, then we should remember that the prompting of God’s Spirit will always have us begin our message with praise for God and tales of what Jesus has done for us, either in the universal picture with the story of his life and death and resurrection, or in our individual stories. As a people walking a path of renewal, to spend time thinking and praying about this is not an optional extra. It is required of all disciples that we should be deeply rooted in the story of Jesus and deeply reflective about the way that God changes our lives. And then, when God gives us the nudge (and that nudge need not involve tongues of fire) we will be ready to share the good news in ways that make sense.