

St Paul's Dorking: small group notes for w/c 6 June 2021
Gathering as church: in anticipation

During June and July this year, we'll be thinking about 'gathering as church' as we look at various passages drawn from Acts chapters 1-13. (See the separate note giving some background on the book of Acts and a summary of our sermon series.)

Q1: What do we tend to think of most when we hear the word 'church'?

Read Acts 2:42-47

Q2: What do we value most about 'church'?

For the disciples, the 7 weeks between Easter (Jesus' death and resurrection) and Pentecost (the coming of the Holy Spirit, Acts 2:1-41) must have been quite a bewildering 'up and down' sort of time – a time where so much was up in the air and they kept flitting between a feeling that everything was lost and a feeling that some wonderful future lay ahead. A positive response to this time of seismic change required that they were ready *both*

- to move on and embrace the 'new' – the reality of the Holy Spirit coming to dwell in their hearts, *and at the same time*
- to hold firmly onto what they had been learning over the last 3 years – that "it is all about Jesus".

Q3: Do we often find ourselves unsure whether to think we are in a season of light or one of darkness, whether we are in a 'spring of hope' or a 'winter of despair'? What about now?

Q4: In a time of big change, how do we judge in what ways to 'hold firm' and in what ways to 'move on'?

Read Acts 1:1-26

For a fortnight or so before Pentecost, Jesus instructed the disciples to "wait" (v.4). This was to be an *active* (not a passive!) wait – staying focused, getting prepared, anticipating the coming of the Spirit. As they waited, they gathered all together (all 120 of them) – first and foremost to pray (united, persistent prayer), but also to keep growing their understanding (through reading the Scriptures) and to make some necessary practical decisions.

Q5: How do we find 'waiting'? Do we regard it positively, as an opportunity to be 'anticipating' and getting ready, or more likely as a time to 'switch off' because nothing's happening?

Q6: "There has never been a spiritual awakening in any country or locality which did not begin in united prayer" (a quote from Arthur Pierson, missionary and preacher, c.1900). Does this ring true? Does it motivate us?

Q7: If we find corporate prayer very hard work, why do we think that is? How might we overcome our barriers?

Q8: Do we think studying Old Testament Scripture is valuable/ helpful, or just something interesting for the academically-inclined but not much use to the rest of us?

Q9: Apart from the extended prayer meetings, the only other thing Acts 1 describes about this period of time is the process for choosing a replacement apostle for Judas. Do we regard practical decision-making as important in the church, and if so how can we do it well?