



May 2, 2021

*Waiting and Praying for Guidance*  
Pastor Jason Bryan-Wegner

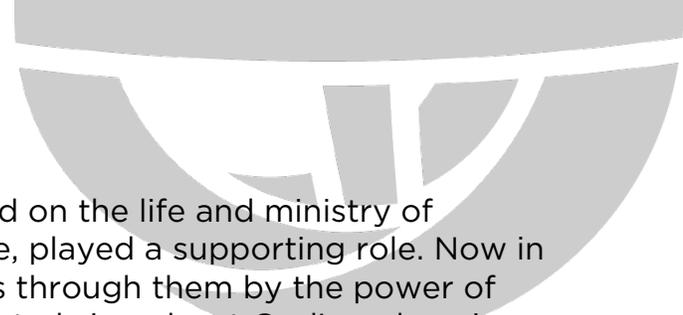
Acts 1:1-11 NSRV

<sup>3</sup>In the first book, Theophilus, I wrote about all that Jesus did and taught from the beginning <sup>2</sup>until the day when he was taken up to heaven, after giving instructions through the Holy Spirit to the apostles whom he had chosen. <sup>3</sup>After his suffering he presented himself alive to them by many convincing proofs, appearing to them during forty days and speaking about the kingdom of God. <sup>4</sup>While staying with them, he ordered them not to leave Jerusalem, but to wait there for the promise of the Father. "This," he said, "is what you have heard from me; <sup>5</sup>for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now."

<sup>6</sup>So when they had come together, they asked him, "Lord, is this the time when you will restore the kingdom to Israel?" <sup>7</sup>He replied, "It is not for you to know the times or periods that the Father has set by his own authority. <sup>8</sup>But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." <sup>9</sup>When he had said this, as they were watching, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight. <sup>10</sup>While he was going and they were gazing up toward heaven, suddenly two men in white robes stood by them. <sup>11</sup>They said, "Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking up toward heaven? This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven."

I don't know about you, but I am not a fan of waiting. A couple weeks ago I went to pick Ellie up after track practice. She hadn't let me know she was done yet, but I thought I'd be nice and get there so she didn't have to wait. I left the house about the same time she was usually done, thinking I'd time it perfectly. I got to the school and didn't see her team anywhere. I waited...and waited...and waited. After sitting there for ten minutes, I realized I should make the most of whatever time I was going to be there. I made a couple of phone calls to congregation members. I followed up on an email that needed an urgent response. I took a deep breath and just took in the world around me for a few minutes. Thirty-five minutes later she poured her tired body into the car. Though I wasn't thrilled that I had to wait so long, but it also didn't really feel like wasted time.

The book of Acts starts out where it left off at the end of Luke's gospel - with Jesus telling his followers to wait for what is coming next. It's the final physical encounter the disciples have with Jesus. It's a critical turning point in the ways God will bring about God's mission of restoration and redemption for the world.



Through the gospel of Luke, the drama centered on the life and ministry of Jesus. The disciples, nearly always in the picture, played a supporting role. Now in Acts the attention shifts to Jesus' followers. It is through them by the power of the Holy Spirit that God does the next big thing to bring about God's redeeming plan for the world.

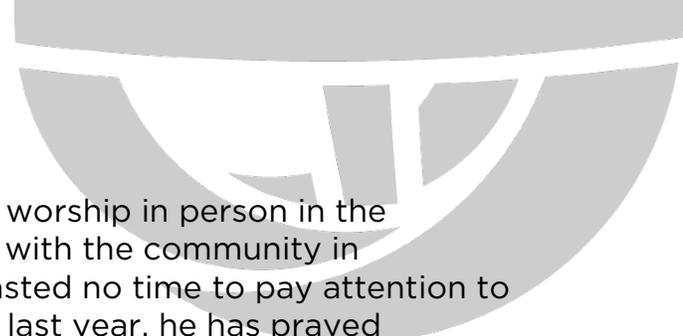
There is purpose to this transition. Jesus doesn't just take off without a word. Rather, he gives them instruction and a glimpse of what's coming. First, they will wait. To discern. To pray for the Spirit, whose power will send them out far beyond the borders of where they are familiar. "You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, to all Judea and Samaria and to the ends of the earth." There is work to do, God's power is not leaving with Jesus, it is just beginning in and through his followers! But first, wait. Wait for the promise of God. Wait for the prompting and leading of the Holy Spirit.

The waiting, and what they did with it, was an important factor in how they would live going forward. As the apostles watched Jesus ascend, two mysterious figures robed in white appear. We don't know who they are, but they waste no time in drawing their attention back down to earth. "Why do you stand there looking up? This Jesus, who has been raised will come again in the same way you saw him go into heaven." It's as if they say, "don't spend too much time thinking of what Jesus is doing now or when he will return. Take this time to get ready, pay attention to what's happening here! You've experienced resurrection. You've seen it, tasted it, touched it. You know the world is different, that God is doing a new thing. Now get ready, pray that God will do this new thing in you. Take a look around at where God may soon be sending you - in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, to the end of the earth!"

What feels so different about this account of the ascension compared to the account at the end of Luke is that this feels like a beginning, rather than an ending. Because of that, we are invited to see ourselves at this beginning. Biblical scholar and preacher Will Willimon reminds us that Acts asks us, "What is God using the Bible to do to us?" You see, Acts is so much more than a history of the early church. It is an invitation to wonder anew what God is stirring in the church today, to listen for where the Spirit is calling us to go and discern in what ways we are being led to serve.

You might remember that right before covid upended our lives, our Dinka worshiping community was in the midst of a leadership transition. In early February of last year, William Deng was lifted up to lead the Dinka community. As the process played out, William's first day as the new Lay Evangelist was March 15, 2020 - the same Sunday we started to move worship exclusively online. I called William after the morning worship services and with a very heavy





heart told him that it was not advised that they worship in person in the afternoon. His first opportunity to lead worship with the community in person would have to wait. And yet, William wasted no time to pay attention to what God was doing in the meantime. Over the last year, he has prayed and organized, coordinated and cared for people, met with leaders and empowered them to serve.

He moved worship to a weekly teleconference. For over a year, about 40 people weekly listened into prayers and sermons, and spent time sharing stories of what was happening in people's lives. It was holy and chaotic, but it was what the community needed at a time they couldn't gather. He leaned into this disruptive time and became a leading voice in the community for following public health guidelines and taking the pandemic seriously.

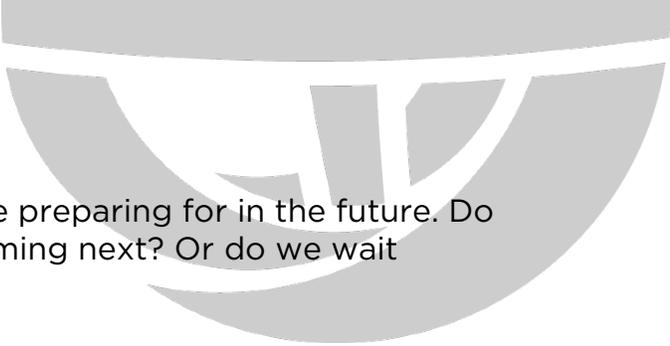
As construction ramped up in our building, William told me one day that the Dinka leadership wanted to do some fundraising for the project. He reminded me that Zumbro has been their spiritual home for nearly 15 years and that we all needed to be part of it together. I was both humbled by this commitment; and a little skeptical. I knew that most fundraising the South Sudanese community did happened in large events. This wasn't a time that any kind of large event could happen. I thanked him for even considering this effort and encouraged him to set a realistic goal.

A couple weeks later I asked him how much the leadership was hoping to raise. He said \$2000. That seemed realistic, but even a stretch, given all that was happening. COVID impacted our Dinka members in so many ways. People had gotten sick, some had died. Others lost their jobs. On top of that, the financial demands of caring for family here and back in South Sudan at the same time was often overwhelming, even when we weren't facing a global pandemic.

On the afternoon of April 12, just a few weeks ago, they held their first in person worship service since March of last year. It was William's first chance to preach to the community gathered in one place. I helped lead worship with him that afternoon - though trust me, I wasn't speaking Dinka.

During the announcements, William called me forward. He talked about the fundraising effort and thanked all the people who supported it. Then he presented a check for \$6000 for the building project. It was more than any of us could have imagined during such a time. It's one of the many ways we've been witness to what God has been doing through the church during this unusual and challenging time.





How we wait makes a difference for what we are preparing for in the future. Do we wait with hesitation or fear about what is coming next? Or do we wait with prayerful, purposeful hope?

We are entering a season of waiting and praying for God's guidance as the process begins to call a new Directing Pastor to lead us here at Zumbro. Last week, we commissioned and prayed for the Call Committee, who will lead us through this time. I would encourage your continued prayers for them. Over the next few months, they will invite you to listen to one another and to the Spirit, to share what's meaningful to you about this church and how you sense God is calling us into the future. In this time, there will also be opportunity to celebrate Pastor Vern and his faithful leadership and ministry among us. This season of waiting will not be boring. There is work to do in the waiting; yes. And that work feels hopeful and filled with gratitude.

Waiting may not always be our favorite activity: whether it is waiting for a family member to be done with an appointment or waiting for the right job opportunity to come along or waiting to know what God will call us to do when the world around us has changed. Yet God calls us, and the church, into these times with purpose and a living hope. We have confidence that because of Christ's resurrection and ascension the Spirit is moving toward us to work in and through us. And as we wait with purpose, new life - resurrection life - is awaiting us. Amen.

