

# In Between Times - 16th May 2021

*Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.*

Date: 16 May 2021

Preacher: Matt Wallace

[ 0 : 0 0 ]    hello hello hello how are we doing my name's matt the vigorous and john's and it's ace to be with you once again for another serving of our sunday sessions we've got a mix of words and images prayers and prose a bit of bible a worship song from the band hopefully enough to keep us engaged with god over this next half hour or so and if you've got younger ones with you there's the option of a sunday stars session with lottie over in that playlist too where she's thinking about jesus's disciple mary magdalene today so do dip in if that sounds up your street talking of playlists we've now got some 65 tracks from the saint john's band in our worship songs playlist here on youtube over five hours of music so do feel free to access that at your leisure and your pleasure on here though well we covered the ascension of jesus last week we've got pentecost next week so we're going to think about that in between time today a theme which will hopefully come into focus as we go through but it's always a good idea to make a point of intentionally inviting god into all that we're about and so as we begin god and gather with you in this way we want to say thank you for your presence with us thank you for your love for us thank you for your guidance of us we're grateful that tomorrow's lifting of many of the restrictions we've been living under has now come around so help us to rediscover the joy of meeting and eating together of going out of physical contact sensible hugging if there is such a thing it's been a long time brewing god so help us to savor the flavor of this new season ahead we know there are variants of the virus which are a cause for concern so give wisdom and insight to those with public health responsibility responsibility which is on our leaders shoulders yes but also on each of us too so keep us mindful of the need for patience staying sensible and sensitive to the needs of others especially those of us still without or only halfway through the vaccination process help us to see this thing through we pray now it's also right to ask that your spirit of peace of justice and of love would be responded to in israel and palestine at this time as we've seen this week such heightened tensions and pretty horrific violence from all sides and yet the years of forced evictions illegal land grabs blockades and discrimination by the israeli by the israeli authorities against palestinian communities when it inevitably fans the flames of a violent response which itself leads to yet more bombs and missiles the tragedy god is that there can be no winners in this conflict over land claims until coexistence is championed and yet no matter how special or significant that land is we know that your kingdom is not grounded in any particular location or people group but is instead about love lived out in response to your love for us and your call for us to love and care for our neighbours whoever and wherever they may be we may feel pretty helpless but in humble solidarity with those who are suffering we ask that you would help us to make the most of the freedom the voice, the privilege we have to commit to stand against oppression and inequality wherever and whenever we encounter it

indeed speak to us through what we explore with you now that we may be ever more transformed into the peacemaking life affirming image of Jesus thank you God Amen Alright, well if you've been keeping up over recent weeks you'll be aware that we've been taking a roughly chronological crawl through the story of those first followers as they encounter and engage with Jesus in the days and weeks following his resurrection from the dead Last week we left the disciples on the Mount of Olives in Jerusalem as Jesus left them to ascend to heaven His ascension took place some 40 days after Easter and some 10 days before Pentecost meaning that there was this week and a bit of almost treading water for the disciples knowing Jesus had gone but also knowing that the promise of his presence through the Holy Spirit had not yet arrived that as we'll see was all to come next week but let's pick up the story from where we left it last week with this from chapter 1 of the book of Acts

Now a lot of names and a fair bit of detail detail there but one detail in particular that they went upstairs to the room where they were staying well that's a significant one because it corresponds with a passage from Mark's Gospel in which we're told this on the first day of the festival of unleavened bread when it was customary to sacrifice the Passover lamb Jesus' disciples asked him where do you want us to go and make preparations for you to eat the Passover?

so he sent two of his disciples telling them go into the city and a man carrying a jar of water will meet you follow him say to the owner of the house he enters the teacher asks where is my guest room where I may eat the Passover with my disciples he will show you a large room upstairs furnished and ready make preparations for us there the disciples left went into the city and found things just as Jesus had told them so they prepared the Passover so Jesus held his last supper in what's become known as the upper room somewhere it seems Jesus had already organised in advance of the meal how do we know this?

well not only does Mark tell us that the disciples would find the room already furnished and ready for a meal but that they were to get there by following a man carrying a water jar and whilst that might seem to be a bit of a random clue to give you know almost like something out of a spy novel we know that since it was usually a woman's job to fetch water a man carrying a water jar would have stood out now we've mentioned this water carrying guy before but it's interesting to wonder just who he was and what his connection with Jesus might have been since he would seem to be the owner of this borrowed room he no doubt was fairly wealthy because we know that the traditional location of this upper room was in an affluent part of the city of Jerusalem just down the road in fact from where the house of the high priest has been identified really high status posh houses in fact here's a little map to give us an idea of where this upper room probably was here's the city of Jerusalem in Jesus' day with a temple down the bottom there here's where remains have been uncovered of Caiaphas' house and here's where it's reckoned the upper room was located or if you like from ground level perspective at a temple

[ 8 : 51 ] Caiaphas lived here the upper room was about here indeed in more peaceful times it's possible to visit a location of this upper room today not the actual room that's long gone but we know that there was a church on this spot from at least the second century and even in the building which stands there now you know itself some 700 years old for me at least you still get a sense of the significance of this location now apart from Jesus' last supper why does this upper room matter?

well aside from it being the location of that meal it also seems to have become a bit of a Jerusalem headquarters for the disciples following Jesus' resurrection indeed knowing that the disciples were mainly from Galilee up north it's little wonder that these out of towners needed a place to stay and meet together in the city and so it's almost certain that it was to this same upper room that Mary came back from the tomb and woke them all up with the news that Jesus was alive it's in this same room that the risen Jesus appeared to the disciples on Easter Sunday evening and said peace be with you showing them his hands his side it's in this same room that Jesus later appears to Thomas as well and then weeks later when the disciples returned from the ascension of Jesus on the Mount of Olives since we're told that they went upstairs to the room where they were staying well it seems they're back in this same room which had become such a significant place of meeting for them you know I do wonder about this man with the jar because as that water carrying action suggests he must have been a pretty hospitable kind of guy giving over this guest room in his house to a bunch of people he maybe only knew through Jesus we don't know this host's name but in his own quiet generous way he's an integral cog in the story both of the Last Supper but also in the birth of the early church indeed just under a quarter of John's gospel takes place in this man's spare room it's quite the claim of fame and certainly deserving of a blue plaque that's for sure it's clear that both Jesus and the disciples identified him as someone they could rely on and maybe there's a lesson in there for us of the importance of being willing to offer and use what God has blessed us with in order to be a blessing to others to open our homes our gardens to share our resources with those in need of a place to feel at home in you know having not been able to entertain or share as we might have wanted to for so long now perhaps one of the marks of the way we follow a resurrected Jesus in the season ahead will be to prioritise hospitality whether in our home down the cafe or the pub in our church buildings for both friends and strangers alike knowing that this was where the disciples had gathered following Jesus' ascension though the story in Acts continues like this in those days

Peter stood up among the believers a group numbering about 120 and said brothers and sisters the scripture had to be fulfilled in which the Holy Spirit spoke long ago through David concerning Judas who served as guide for those who arrested Jesus he was one of our number and shared in our ministry for said Peter it is written in the book of Psalms may another take his place of leadership therefore it is necessary to choose one of the men who have been with us the whole time the Lord Jesus was living among us beginning from John's baptism to the time when Jesus was taken up from us for one of these must become a witness with us of his resurrection so they nominated two men Joseph called Barsabbas also known as Justice and Matthias then they prayed Lord you know everyone's heart show us which of these two you have chosen to take over this apostolic ministry which Judas left to go where he belongs then they cast lots and the lot fell to Matthias so he was added to the eleven apostles now it's an interesting little episode for all sorts of reasons for a start we're told there were about 120 believers in total a number which includes the eleven remaining disciples probably some of their wives and children plus women like Mary Magdalene and Joanna

Jesus' mom and brothers presumably his sisters too you'd imagine there'd be Mary Martha and Lazarus there the two Emmaus road companions and who knows maybe even people we've looked at like Zacchaeus or the bloke Jesus had healed by the Paul of Bethesda maybe other blind and lame folks he'd healed too Mark's already told us the room was a large one but I suspect it was quite the who's who of those with tales to tell of how Jesus had impacted their lives and what stories they would be what a church they would become indeed whilst 120 isn't perhaps as big a number of people in this early church as you might expect it just shows the impact that a relatively small but completely dedicated devoted bunch of people can have in spreading the good news of Jesus' love I'm here today and you're watching this today because these early followers spread the word you and I are testimony today of their early enthusiasm and faithfulness that's pretty incredible

I mean I wonder who'll be able to trace their faith back to us in 2000 years time and yet from these 120 people Peter declares that they now need to choose someone to take the place of Judas Judas Iscariot one of the original 12 disciples who had tragically taken his own life after betraying Jesus into the hands of the authorities citing a verse from the Psalms may another take his place of leadership as proof of their need for a replacement they end up with a bloke called Matthias being chosen chosen after prayer yeah but also perhaps strangely so after the casting of lots equivalent of tossing a coin now I don't know what you make of this method of seeking God's guidance there is a bit of biblical precedent to it not least about which priests should serve in a temple and so on but

[ 16 : 26 ] I'm not sure I'd recommend it as a decent way to decide things I mean true story this I remember in my teenage years praying to God about this girl I kind of liked and whether I should ask her out or not so having prayed I tossed the coin heads I would ask her tails I wouldn't came down on tails and yet I asked her out anyway now despite me paying for the pizza the date was a disaster so make that coin tossing guidance what you will and so who knows if the disciples got the right decision with this Matthias guy I mean we never hear from him again in the Bible so perhaps they'd have been better off waiting and appointing Paul or Jesus brother James who went on to be a leader in the early church or maybe and here's a radical thought maybe Mary Magdalene should have been promoted into the twelve and yet I guess the bigger question is why why did

Peter feel the need to replace Judas in the first place yes there's this pretty obscure verse from Psalms which is quoted as justification but I'd say there's more to it than that you see in originally appointing twelve disciples we could say that Jesus was deliberately trying to mirror the original twelve tribes of Israel the ancient way in which the people of God were organized into twelve groups and apportioned land tribes named after the sons of Jacob the father of the technicolor dreamcoated Joseph and his brothers so for the ancient twelve tribes of Israel I think the twelve disciples a way perhaps of seeing the disciples initial role as helping the people of Israel to turn and follow Jesus however if this twelve strong leadership team was still Jesus main intention you'd have thought he himself would have appointed a replacement for Judas in those weeks following his resurrection would have been dead easy for him to do and yet as we saw last week with Jesus response to the disciples asking him

Lord are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel it seems Jesus was instead trying to move the disciples beyond this tribal land focused physical kingdom building language nah that's too insular says Jesus think bigger go beyond Jerusalem Judea and Samaria take my good news to every tribe every tongue take my good news to the ends of the earth and yet despite this clear commission it seems Peter and the others still haven't quite got the hint because they're still concerning themselves with 12 being the magic number for disciples harking back almost to the days of old as if they're still thinking along the lines of God's kingdom being simply about their nation now as we'll see next week with Pentecost the disciples localized nation centered view is forced to become international as people from all over the known world receive

God's Holy Spirit but for this in-between period between Jesus ascension and the spirit coming at Pentecost they're still holding on to maybe finding comfort in a nostalgic familiar way of thinking and in a way who can blame them because in the midst of so much uncertainty it's not surprising that there's a tendency to want to cling on to what they know indeed it's a mindset which we may feel some affinity with in that as lockdown lifts we may be looking forward most of all to getting back inside to what were previously familiar settings back to visiting our friends or families homes back to the office back to the pub the curry house the coffee shop back maybe to church and why not there's nothing wrong with that indeed there's so much that's good in enjoying a return to familiar surroundings amongst old friends and faces and in many ways

I can't wait for that and yet as I think is illustrated by the disciples somewhat unimaginative decision to replace Judas in order to simply stick with what they knew maybe the call on our lives in this in between time is to instead make sure that we're staying open-minded to whatever change whatever new things God might be wanting to establish in our midst what might that entail for you for us maybe going forward well as I've already mentioned it may be that God's calling you to embrace a new emphasis on hospitality to invite both old and new friends into your home your life and share in new ways with them I mean I wonder who was the last new friend you made someone who you let into your thoughts someone who joined whatever established friendship circle you may be a part of is it simply going to be the old gang getting back together or is there room for someone new new guests in your upper room if you like guests who might just surprise you with what or who they bring to the table or perhaps in whatever community group or church you are a part of just as those 120 followers of

[ 22 : 31 ] Jesus changed the world I wonder what new vision what new approach God might be calling you calling us to embrace you know for us at St John's well I've been having various meetings and conversations over recent weeks and if I'm honest part of what I'm talking through with some folks is far from straightforward working through the implications of change so I've had conversations with various leaders who feel it's the right time for them to stand down from a church role they've previously held but but this putting down of some responsibilities means that they're looking to focus on something new something different and that's great but as Vicka it's also a bit unsettling because it means there are gaps opening up or maybe question marks over what should or shouldn't be replaced or continued and yet just as a gap in a garden or a tree canopy allows new growth to emerge so too

I trust that God will guide us as a church to know a decent way forward hopefully not through casting lots but through prayerful imaginative conversation and through people listening to God's call indeed part of this exploration of new ways forward will involve us putting together a list of all sorts of ways people can serve and get involved with our life as a church community I've currently identified 90 or so roles and opportunities for ways to people to get stuck in ideally so there's at least one thing one way in which every member of our church can serve and contribute to our community life together so before that list comes out have a think have a pray I mentioned this the other week in an extra time session but how might God be encouraging you to get involved in an ideal world what would you love to do or be a part of and together well let's see what emerges over the coming weeks and months in our plan for

St John's all being well with restrictions is to begin to meet together in person from the last Sunday in June and spend those summer Sundays having time to sing songs of worship pray together share stories and so on but also to spend time simply getting socially fit if you like getting used to being in each other's company again I'm looking forward to it and we'll see what online sessions we put out alongside that as one of the changes we'll need to embrace is a mixed mode of being church both online and in person we'll talk more about all this over the next couple of weeks but I wonder for you whether or not you're past St.

John's or in whatever way that works for you I wonder what new horizons new opportunities new thoughts God might just be calling you to be open to not necessarily reverting to what you knew before the dozen disciples kind of mindset but instead saying to God okay what of the old is worth keeping but what of the new is worth embracing too we got our extra time session to think through some of the things we've been looking at today and next week we'll look at the difference the spirit of God makes in our lives as we explore the meaning of Pentecost but as we draw this one today to a close my prayer for you my prayer for me is that as this new season begins to unfold we would know both the presence and the prompting of God in our lives reassuring us with the return of what we've missed but also reinvigorating us with the prospect of what might be to come as we place ourselves and our future firmly into

God's loving hands indeed by way of helping us do just that here's a track which the St. John's band have recorded for us this week a song which speaks of the importance of worshipping God as a priority which then puts the rest of our lives into renewed and rightful perspective it's the song made for worship music music music music music music music I abandon every distraction

[ 27 : 52 ] My attention is set on You My devotion, Jesus, my portion My affection is set on You I was made to worship I was made for Your embrace I was made to worship I was made to bless Your name I will bless the Lord at all times I will bless the Lord at all times I was made to worship

I was made to bless Your name I will shout Your praise forever I will shout Your praise forever I was made to worship I was made to bless Your name Captivated by Your goodness I was made to worship

Your holy presence Giving over all of me I was made to worship I was made for Your embrace I was made to worship I was made to bless Your name I will bless the Lord at all times I will bless the Lord at all times I was made to worship I was made to bless Your name I will shout Your praise forever

I will shout Your praise forever I was made to worship I was made to bless Your name My heart and flesh cry out For You to fill me up You satisfy me Fill me with power and truth Fill me with love from You You satisfy me My heart and flesh cry out For You to fill me up You satisfy me Fill me with power and truth

Fill me with love from You You satisfy I will bless the Lord at all times I will bless the Lord at all times I will bless the Lord at all times I was made to worship I was made to bless Your name I was made to worship I was made to bless Your name I was made to worship

[ 33 : 05 ] I was made to worship I was made for Your embrace I was made to worship I was made to bless Your name And so God, we want to thank you for the time you give us to consider the right way forward with you.

Help us to be open to your voice in our lives over these coming days. Open to your prompting, your encouragement, your equipping for whatever lies in store for us as individuals, as households, as communities, as your church.

All working together for your kingdom to come here on earth as it is in heaven. Indeed, may your blessing, the blessing of God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit.

May your blessing go with us, that we might know your endorsement, your encouragement, your excitement in our lives, as we seek to love you and love our neighbours as ourselves, both now and always.

Amen. Amen.

[ 34 : 56 ] Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.