

# Delays aren't always bad

BY BISHOP CHRISTOPHER

IT'S not much of a secret that I quite enjoy my trips across the water to the Isle of Wight. Over the years that I've been in this diocese, I've crossed over in just about as many ways as you can name – except swimming.

There are often quite fascinating sights to be taken in, and even delays can be intriguing. A few months ago our Fastcat was stopped midway to allow the aircraft carrier HMS Queen Elizabeth to leave port, and a couple of weeks back we were told that the hovercraft was going to be late leaving because of a small group of canoeists. Somehow delays like this are less frustrating than the usual kinds.

Some delays are frustrating, some are seriously problematic, but some also ask us to pause and think. One delay that has puzzled readers of Scripture over the centuries is the apparent delay to the return of Christ, who boldly announces that he is 'coming soon' (Revelation 3 v11).

After 2000 years, we find ourselves wondering how soon is soon, and of course every century there's been speculation that it may just be the last for this world.

This might all sound a bit gloomy or other-worldly, and more appropriate for Advent in any case, but it actually has

a lot to do with the feasts of the Ascension and Pentecost. If people ask whether we are living in the last days, or the end times, the answer is 'yes'. But, it just happens that we have been living in the last days since the time that Jesus walked the earth and since the outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost.

If that sounds a bit odd, the point is actually quite straightforward, albeit challenging. It means that throughout the ages, the call to Christians is to be alert and watchful, to notice what is going on in the world, to look out for where God is at work, and to seek the Kingdom of God now.

That seems to me to be part of the Ascension message in Acts chapter 1. Jesus is taken up to heaven, and immediately he is gone the disciples are told that he will return, but with the gentle rebuke, 'why do you stand staring at the sky?'

Staring at the sky is always a temptation for Christians, but awaiting Christ means redirecting our gaze to the world around for there is work to be done, and Christ is doing it through the Spirit.

What do we see in the world around us now? To whom is God calling us? And if our hovercraft is delayed, how might we use the time God gives us for his glory and for the good of the kingdom?



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JUNE 2019

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