

Proper 15 / 9 Trinity Year C – St Helen's, Abingdon  
17 August 2025



Jeremiah 23.23–29 / Hebrews 11.29 – 12.2 / Luke 12.49–56

I came to bring fire to the earth, and how I wish it were already kindled!

✠ In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit – *Amen*

IT COMFORTS ME TO REMEMBER that Jesus sometimes felt impatient. Not that his aching for the fires of judgment can fairly be compared to my own irritation that the X3 bus hasn't arrived on the High Street yet; Jesus longed for the consummation of all things in the glorious kingdom of his Father, but I just want to get to the city centre in good time for a lecture. But we can derive some consolation from observing Jesus wishing for his time to bring all things to their perfect completion, taking his seat at the right hand of the throne of God. We may be testy, we may be irritable, but our Lord and Saviour has been impatient before us.

And by the way, that's entirely in keeping with good, sound doctrine. Impatience and feeling stress belong to Jesus in his full humanity; who among us hasn't wished for some exciting prospect already to be kindled? Who *doesn't* feel stress until our important obligations — taxes, job interviews, rehearsals, weeks of pregnancy, even just an ordinary day's work — until such tasks as these are completed? Impatience belongs to the human condition, and when Scripture says that Jesus was tested *in every way as we are*, yet without sin, I am extremely confident that waiting impatiently for the X3 bus counts as one of those ways (although in Jesus's case it might have been the Tsadeh-3 donkey cart to Tiberias, and

*do not* take the local that stops in Sepphoris and Cana, the traffic is *brutal* out of Cana, you'll *never* get to Tiberias on time). A fully *human* Jesus will assuredly have felt fully *impatient* sometimes.

The fully *divine* aspect of our Lord, maybe not so much. Now, when we talk about human and divine in Jesus, we have to tread carefully; there are doctrinal rules for how you may say what you're getting at. For instance, one rule requires that we can't posit any *conflict* between humanity and divinity in Jesus, so I would be wrong (or at least *imprecise*) to suggest that the divine Jesus couldn't have felt impatient. {For the rest of the sermon, I'll try to remember to say 'Jesus' for the fella whom we think of as 'from Nazareth', and 'the Son' for the same *person* except we think of him as 'from heaven'.} No, there can't be any conflict between humanity and divinity in the Son. Cos in the first place, how would we know? Nobody, nobody *fully and exclusively* human, could *truly* know what the eternal Word of God thought or felt about our experience of delays. For one thing, the Holy Trinity is *eternal*; time just *isn't an issue* for the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost. For another, even granting that the eternal Son had experienced time on our side of it, *Jesus's* side, the *slow* side, we can't begin to put our heads into what it entails to have universal understanding of everything, all causes and effects, all perspectives and possibilities so as to sense what the Son thinks about time. Not even the Team Rector Designate knows all that; how much less do the rest of us? So when we talk about what the eternal Son *must have* known or felt, we're just talking through our hat. We don't know what our dearest loved ones *must have known* or *felt*, we don't even know what *we* would have felt. Our speculation about what the divine Son would have felt has no more authority than a fish speculating about what humans do and think.

So when we see that Jesus, the regular human Jesus, felt impatient for the coming of the Judgement Day, we can trust that his impatience was congruent with the divine Son's perspective on the end of all things —

*no conflict*. The Son of God, who knows that day will bring the restoration of all that is broken, relief from all oppression, the fulfilled perfection of all that is lacking, of what now is partial and evil, the Son regards *that* day as something devoutly to be wished. Having all the time in the world, *more* being than time, the Son doesn't feel 'impatience'; but the Son surely wills the best for us, and to the extent that we're not yet complete, and our world still suffers from *lack*, from *perishing* and *decay*, the Son turns everything toward our completion in perfection. That's not *our* impatience, but it maps our impatience onto God's eternity.

Time lies between us and our completion, as a stage on which we display to God and our neighbours whether we are impatient for perfection, striving with all our heart, and with all our soul, and with all our mind, and with all our strength — or whether we are content with the pretty-good world as we encounter it. Time offers us the canvas onto which to project our vision of the Kingdom of God, a world so good that even our grouchiest, crustiest old codger of a fellow citizen realises that they want to be part of it. That's a work that *we* can't just *do*; we can't *build* the Kingdom by our own efforts here in Abingdon's green and pleasant land. But by *striving* to live in grace, by *aiming* for God's complete perfection, we align ourselves with the way that Jesus walked. We *open our hearts* to let God complete what we can't *achieve* from our own strength. We say a firm and resolute '**No!**' to the forces of decay and distraction, with the Holy Spirit seconding, harmonising, supporting our voice with the unutterable sighs of creation's alpha truth and omega righteousness. What we can't *know* on this side of time, we *affirm* in timeless faith. What we can't *accomplish*, we *pray for* in eternal trust.

So it's all right if we feel a little impatient sometimes, for better days that we know will come. Jesus has been there before us, *with* us, and he too wished that the purifying fire were already kindled. That impatience, Jesus's impatience, looks less like my frustration at the bus stop and more

like the characters we hear about in the Letter to the Hebrews: bearing witness through faith in action, resisting oppression, standing up for justice, enduring persecution, persisting through homelessness — faithful witnesses ‘of whom the world isn’t worthy’. ‘Yet all these, though they were *commended* for their faith, did not receive what was promised, since God had provided something *better* so that they would not, without *us*, be made perfect.’

The impatience we share with Jesus looks toward the goal God has provided for us, when we will be joined with Moses and Joshua, Rahab, Gideon, Barak, Deborah, Samson, David and Samuel, with Blessed Mary and Peter and Paul and Mary Magdalene, with our own mothers and fathers in faith, because the work *won’t be done* till we, in perfect solidarity, can lay aside every burden and the sin that clings so closely, and run with perseverance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus the *pioneer* and *perfecter* of our faith, who for the sake of the joy that was set before him endured the cross, disregarding its shame; and *united* with one another, with our friends and adversaries and family and neighbours, with St Helen and St Nicolas and St Michael the Archangel, all the angels and all the saints, all *united* in the *Body of Christ*: together in Him we take our seat at the right hand of the throne of God.

✙ In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit—

**Amen**

(Yes, that last sentence is ungrammatical,  
but I’m willing to gamble that it will come off in oral presentation.)