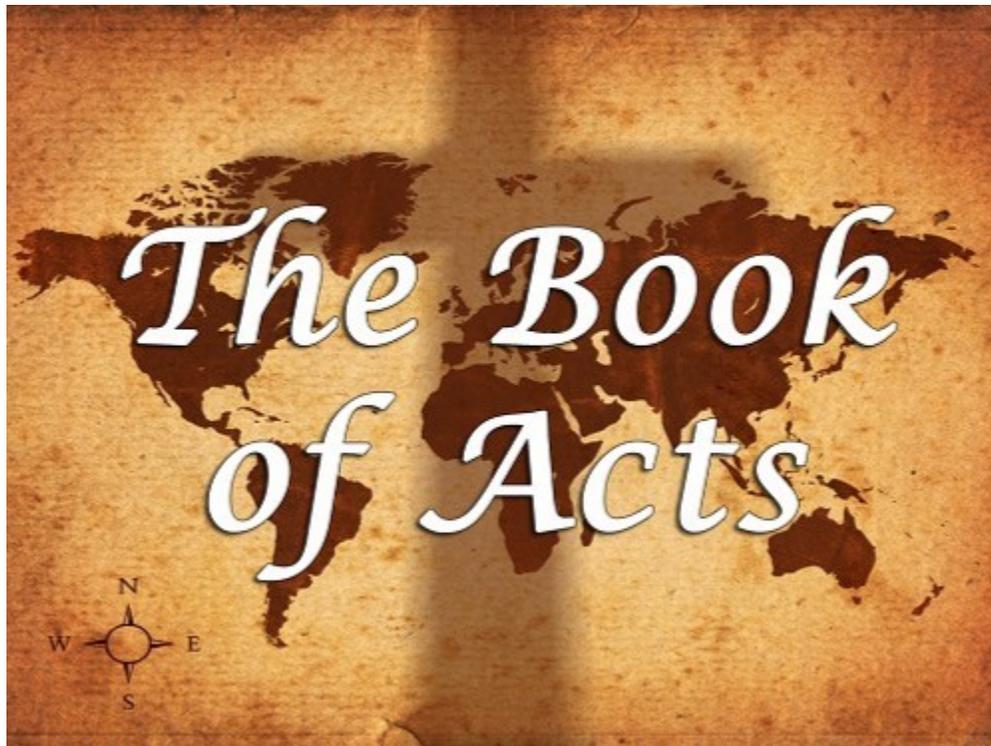


Actioning the Book of Acts



**A summer seminar on the Book of Acts
Sunday 15 January, 2017,
at St James' Anglican Church, Lower Hutt**

Session 1: Mapping the Book of Acts (Jean Malcolm)

In 2013 we explored the Gospel of Luke in our Summer Seminar. This Year we are exploring “Part Two” of Luke’s story set out for “Theophilus” (the one who loves God) so that Theophilus might understand more fully the connection between the things that Jesus did and taught, and the way his followers carried on this work, inspired by God’s Spirit. I hope that we might also increase our own understanding of how we are part of this ongoing work.

To gain an overview of the action in Acts, we are going to map where it happened. This will help us see the journeys of the people of The Way, and feel connected to their story.

In Acts, Chapter 2, we hear that Jews from all over the then known world are in Jerusalem for the Festival of Pentecost. They experience the outpouring of God’s Spirit on the Disciples, and in turn many are made disciples themselves. We know little about what happened to most of them when they returned home, but it’s interesting to think about how they might have influenced the spread of Gospel living in their own contexts.



The Book of Acts is a rollicking Adventure Story. It has earthquakes, shipwrecks, avenging angels, harrowing escapes, riots, murder plots, political intrigue, courtroom drama, and more. Its full name is “The Acts of the Apostles”, and it does tell many of the stories of the things that the Apostles and early prominent church leaders did. However, the Book is really about the acts of God – the movement of the Holy Spirit that fires up and continues to fuel the blossoming church, and the actions of the Risen Jesus Christ, as seen embodied in the early Christian communities.

When we hear passages from Acts read as part of our services of worship, we usually hear them in isolation from the whole “adventure-story”. So today we are going to map the whole story, and ponder where that map might lead us as we continue to be the church in our own 21st century context.

Two key characters in Acts are those two pillars of the early church – St Peter and St Paul. The first 12 chapters follow the fortunes of Peter. Paul makes his first appearance under his other name – Saul – at the end of chapter 7, and then we hear about his dramatic conversion in chapter 9, but then he disappears for a while, returning at the end of chapter 11. Peter and Paul are both engaged in the development of the church as it begins to expand beyond “Jerusalem... Judea and Samaria” (Acts 1: 8), then as the story continues to ripple out “to the ends of the earth”, Peter disappears and Paul – known as the Apostle to the Gentiles – becomes prominent.

But the other key characters in the story are not so much the individuals, but the churches – the ekklesiai, the bodies of faithful people – in each place where the Christian Way took root. We are going to get to know these churches, and see whether there is anything which they can teach us about being a body of the faithful people of God in our own contexts. We’ll divide into six groups. Each group will learn about one of the early church communities, discuss what it might have been like for them, consider what they as a community might have to say to us as a Christian community today, and then introduce the community we have “listened to” – along with the insights gained – back to the wider group.

The Jerusalem Church

Where the church began – with the coming of the Holy Spirit on those gathered there for the Festival of Pentecost, after the ascension of Jesus. They practised communal sharing of possessions, and a shared life of prayer. The Jerusalem church was led by Peter and then James (the brother of Jesus).

The church was Jewish, and included Hebrews and Hellenists (Jews from both Hebrew and Greek cultural backgrounds), which led inevitably to some conflict, which was addressed by appointing seven “deacons” to manage their communal life. Amongst these seven men were Stephen (who was later stoned to death in the presence of Saul/Paul, Philip who took the gospel to Samaria, and baptised an Ethiopian eunuch who was on his way home from Jerusalem, and Nicolas, who was a proselyte (convert to Judaism) from Antioch, which will become another important church centre.

When the Jerusalem church began to suffer persecution, many members were scattered to other places... thus enacting the sending that Jesus commanded them to (Acts 1: 8). The church

suffered from famine and was supported by the church in Antioch. A conference, or Council, held in Jerusalem later proposed terms for inclusion of Gentiles in the church.

The church in Antioch

Antioch was on the border between what is now known as Turkey, and Syria – a significant geographical, military, and economic location. The church here was a largely a Gentile church. It began with refugees from persecution of the Jerusalem church, and believers from Cyprus and Cyrene then joined them. Paul and Barnabas became leaders of the church. The community had a relationship with the church back in Jerusalem, raising funds to help them when there was a famine. But they also were a significant centre themselves for ministry and the sending out of people to take the gospel further afield. Antioch was where the ‘followers of The Way’ were first known as ‘Christians’. From here all three of Paul’s missionary journeys were launched.

The Church in Rome

Situated in the powerful city of Rome, this church existed in a political environment.

In around 49 CE the emperor Claudius expelled Jews from Rome on account of a disturbance over a certain “Chrestus” which is quite probably a version of “Christos”. It is thought that this refers to a dispute breaking out among the large Jewish population of Rome over the proclamation of Jesus as the Christ, the Messiah. With the expulsion of Jews from Rome (including Jewish Christians) the Christian community became largely Gentile. When the expulsion was revoked after Claudius’s death, the returning Jewish Christians found that the Gentile members of the church community were not willing to yield leadership back to them.

The Church in Corinth

Corinth was the capital of the province of Achaia, in the south of what is now known as Greece. It was a large and prosperous city. Situated only fifty miles from Athens it was considered much less sophisticated and a crass cousin to that intellectual centre that Athens was, having been settled by freed slaves 100 years before.

The makeup of this church was diverse – probably a mix of Jewish and Gentile background; both male and female leadership; factions and controversy disturbed its stability... some felt that they had achieved what God had for them to do and that there was nothing left to learn; some thought their gifts and insights made them more important or more highly developed in their faith than other members. Paul’s famous Epistle to them addressed some of these issues.

The Church in Ephesus

Ephesus was the capital city and commercial centre for the Roman province of Asia (now Turkey), situated on its western coast, across the Aegean Sea from Athens. Paul visited there on his second and third missionary journeys, spending between 2 and 3 years there all up.... including probably some time in prison. Ephesus was a thoroughly Roman city, the centre for many Roman cultural and ritual festivities. The introduction of Christianity to this pagan setting caused “no little disturbance” (Acts 19: 29) among those whose livelihoods depended on practices which Christianity denounced as idolatrous. In Revelation 2:1-7 the community is described as orthodox and faithful, but lacking in the love and action that it had showed at the beginning.

The Church in Thessalonica

Thessalonica was the capital of Macedonia, in the north of what is now known as Greece. It was situated at the crossing of four major roads and had one of the best natural harbours of the northern Aegean Sea.

The church in Thessalonica was founded by Paul when he went there after being expelled from Philippi.

The church community also suffered from persecution for their faith, and tended not to have many resources of wealth or civic status. They were encouraged by Paul to abandon any honours or distinctions that they might gain by competing with others in their society, and instead to imitate Jesus by enduring difficulties.

It is thought that Paul and Silas plied their trade as tent-makers here and used that business as their base for religious dialogue and sharing the gospel. While they also preached at the local synagogue, it was the market encounters rather than the synagogue engagements that were the primary context out of which the church at Thessalonica was born.

Session 2: The Kerygma (message) of the Early Church and its Importance for us Today (Murray Wills)

The term *κήρυγμα*, (*Kerygma*) is a Greek word meaning “proclamation” or “preaching”. This is distinct from teaching or instruction (*didaskein*), or writing. It has been compared to the actions of a Town Cryer, someone who claims public attention.

The Church today is a continuation of first-century Christianity. We don’t want to imitate every cultural detail, but we do want to continue the faith and message of the early church. The Church was established by the Holy Spirit working initially within the apostles from the day of Pentecost.

The Book of Acts is a major resource for us and evangelism is a major theme. Luke’s first book (the Gospel of Luke) dealt with all Jesus “began to do and teach”. Acts (also attributed to the author of Luke) deals with “what Jesus continued to do and teach”, the work of the Lord in forming and providing for those he has saved.

Acts begins where Luke ends, repeating the ascension of Jesus as he calls the disciples to mission. In the 40 days after his resurrection Jesus demonstrated himself to be alive in many ways and repeated the instruction to the disciples to wait in Jerusalem for the coming of the Spirit (Luke 3:16, 24:49). The work of the Spirit reveals a new era. In the days after Jesus’ resurrection, he continued to teach them about the Kingdom of God (Acts 1:3) and in particular the relationship between his proclamation of the Kingdom of God and his death and resurrection. Prayer was essential prior to the outpouring of the Spirit. The disciples are called “Spirit-empowered witnesses that will take the message of salvation “to the ends of the earth (Acts 1:3-11).

Jesus identified two ways that would help the Gospel find its way to the unreached and non-Christian world (Gentile and Jew). In Acts 1:8 Jesus tells his disciples that they will “receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you, and you will be my witness in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth”. This first proclamation is that Jesus indicates that the advance of his kingdom will only happen with the Holy Spirit leading.

The second proclamation is that Jesus indicates that the disciples will be witnesses, verbally proclaiming the Gospel, testifying to the truth. “By connecting the Holy Spirit and the Gospel proclamation to the geographic advance of the Gospel, Jesus highlights their importance to the missionary task” ¹ and of the Holy Spirit in performing this task. The Holy Spirit will fill, empower, and strengthen them, and even allow them to speak in many different languages (see Acts 2). “After they prayed, the place where they were meeting was shaken. And they were

¹ Clinton West, "Power and Proclamation," Center for Great Commission Studies,(14 January 2016).

all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God boldly.” Acts 4:31

Jesus was forming a new community. A community that would provide the key to the continued proclamation of the good news, taking it to the ends of the earth, to everyone. On the road to Emmaus, “he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself” (Luke 24:27). He summarized his message: “Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms”. (Luke 24:44)

When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them. The Spirit was poured out on everyone present. (Acts 2:1-4) Peter quickly identified this as the coming of the Spirit Jesus had promised. He then began proclaiming the good news. (See Acts 2:14-24).

The essence of Peter’s proclamation of the good news is as follows: (Peter’s kerygma): Jesus, attested to by God with deeds of power, wonders, and signs [was] handed over to you according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God (“according to the Scriptures”). You killed him but God raised him up. This Jesus [whom] God raised up, we witnessed. He is now at the right hand of the Father, and the Spirit has been poured out. Repent, and be baptized to receive forgiveness of sins (Acts 2:14-40).²

As the apostles began the work of preaching and proclaiming Christ, they proclaimed a message that was rather basic and simple. More extended teaching or instruction (Διδαχή, didache, in Greek) would come later, after baptism. But the initial proclamation of Christ was simple, and to the point.

The kerygma of the early church, especially those by the apostles Peter and Paul in the book of Acts, give us a basic outline of how the first-century inspired authors presented Christianity to different groups. This early "proclamation" describes the basic truths of the Gospel about Jesus:³

1. fulfils many OT prophecies – Acts 2:17-21,30-31,34; 3:18-19,24; 10:43; 13:17-23,27; 33:33-37,40-41; 26: 6-7,22-23
2. sent by YHWH as promised – Acts 2:23; 3:26
3. performed miracles to confirm His message and reveal God's compassion – Acts 2:22; 3:16; 10:38

² Jeff Reed, *Kerygmatic Communities: Evangelism and the Early Churches* (Ames, Iowa: BILD International, 2011).

³ "Special Topic: The Kerygma," Bible Lessons International, <http://www.freebiblecommentary.org/special_topics/kerygma.html> (14 January 2017).

4. delivered up, disowned – Acts 3:13-14; 4:11
5. crucified – Acts 2:23; 3:14-15; 4:10; 10:39; 13:28; 26:23
6. raised to life – Acts 2:24,31-32; 3:15,26; 4:10; 10:40; 13:30; 17:31; 26:23
7. exalted to God's right hand – Acts 2:33-36; 3:13,21
8. will come again – Acts 3:20-21
9. appointed Judge – Acts 10:42; 17:31
10. sent Holy Spirit – Acts 2:17-18,33,38-39; 10:44-47
11. Saviour for all who believe – Acts 13:38-39
12. no one else is Saviour – Acts 4:12; 10:34-36

Here are some of the ways to respond to these Apostolic pillars of truth:

1. Repent – Acts 2:38; 3:19; 17:30; 26:20
2. Believe – Acts 2:21; 10:43; 13:38-39
3. Be baptized – Acts 2:38; 10:47-48
4. Receive the Spirit – Acts 2:38; 10:47
5. All may come – Acts 2:39; 3:25; 26:23

This is the heart and core of the Gospel – it is the message the apostles preached, despite threats of death. It's a life-transforming message, a message about new life, a message worth living for, and a message worth dying for."⁴

The gift of the Holy Spirit is crucial in equipping Jesus's followers then and today.

The Spirit:

- anointed Jesus and energized his birth (Luke 1:35; Acts 3:21-22; 4:16-18; 10:38)
- is the giver of dreams and visions (2:17; 7:55-56)
- gives revelatory words and inspires Scripture (1:2; 1:16, 4:25; 7:51; 28:25)
- gives wisdom and discernment (Luke 21:15; Acts 5:3; 6:3,5,10; 9:31; 13:9; 16:18)
- leads praise for what God has done (Luke 1:67; Acts 2:4; 10:46; 19:6)
- leads into witness (Acts 1:4, 8; 4:8; 31; 5:32; 67:10; 9:17), as well as teaching (9:31; 13:52)
- In summary, the Spirit directs the new community and us in the new life as he clothes it with power from on high (Luke 24:49)⁵

A good job that the disciples waited before setting out to preach the Gospel!

⁴ Michael Morrison, "Preaching in the Book of Acts Part 1: Peter," Grace Communion International, <<https://www.gci.org/acts/peter>> (14 January 2017).

⁵ Adapted from Darrell L. Bock, ed. *A Theology of Luke and Acts* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 2012). 226

The spread of the Gospel

Opposition and persecution, rather than stopping the advance of the Gospel actually served to propel those preaching the Gospel forward, and there are many examples of people coming to faith under these conditions. The stoning of Stephen marked the beginning of intense persecution and this scattered the believers throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria. Another example is the two years that Paul spent in a Roman Prison, “proclaiming the kingdom of God and teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ with all boldness and without hindrance” (Acts 28:28-31) It is beyond the topic of this essay to detail the spread of the Gospel, however the importance of how the Gospel spread has implications for mission and ministry today also.

The relevance of the text for today.

The message has not changed and it is as true for us today as it was for the first disciples.

- a) We should repent of our sins, accept baptism and live in the new life which Christ is offering.
- b) We are sent to proclaim the kingdom of God and to see the kingdom of God expand.
- c) The Holy Spirit is at work in us, will empower us and strengthen us for the task. Corinthians 2:2 says we have received God’s Spirit “so that we might understand” the things given to us by God – the good news of Jesus Christ.
- d) We are sent to proclaim the Gospel message to everyone, not just other Christians, and we are empowered to do this (see point 2). This picks up on Peter’s topic of mission today.
- e) Prayer connects us with the Holy Spirit and enables us to proclaim the Gospel with boldness.

Questions:

1. Faced with the truth that “We are called not just to proclaim the Gospel message to other Christians” – how does this challenge us?
2. Both Gospel proclamation and the power of the Holy Spirit framed the missionary task for the early disciples. How is this lived out today?
3. How can we encourage the Holy Spirit to work within us?

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Session 3: Mission – then and now: the early Church’s mission and ours (Peter Bengé)

The mission of the early Church

- 1.1. The mission of the early Church was consistent with the mission of Jesus. The core of his message is briefly expressed in Mark 1:15. “The time is fulfilled and the kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news” (cf. Luke 8:1). What Jesus spoke with his lips and what he expressed in the way he lived were one and the same – the coming of the kingdom (reign) of God. In the Gospels we see him training his followers to play a part in proclaiming and enacting God’s reign (Luke 9:1-2; 10:1-9).
- 1.2. Just before his ascension, Jesus said to his disciples, “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 (1:8). This is one way of understanding the structure of the Book of *Acts* – as the story of the church’s growth in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and into the distant parts of the earth. All through this expansion the Church’s mission was consistent with Jesus’ ministry and with the mission he entrusted to his followers while he was alive – proclaiming and enacting (i.e. being a sign of) the reign of God. Enacting the reign of God involved not just healings and other miracles, but the conduct of the early Church, e.g. in commitment to prayer (1:14), in acts of generosity, compassion and commitment to communal life, (2:44-47), and in being willing to accept Gentile members as full equals in the Church (15:1-35).

What is mission?

- 2.2. So what is mission then? Mission may be defined as the total undertaking God has assigned the Church for the salvation of the world. This involves both proclaiming and enacting God’s reign. It is customary to distinguish ministry (the Church’s activity within the church fellowship) from mission (the Church’s activity in the wider society). But if we are to proclaim and enact God’s reign with integrity, what we do within the church fellowship has to be consistent with what we do and proclaim outside the fellowship. It is all of one piece.
- 2.3. While mission includes the proclamation of God’s good news, most broadly it entails living in obedience to Christ (and his teaching and example) and in the power of the Holy Spirit. As members of the Church, as far as we are able, we seek to live both individually and communally as people who proclaim the reign of God and who show by

the way we live the reality of that reign.

2.4. This holistic understanding of mission is seen in the Anglican Communion's 5 marks of mission. These are:

- To proclaim the Good News of the Kingdom
- To teach, baptise and nurture new believers
- To respond to human need by loving service
- To seek to transform unjust structures of society, to challenge violence of every kind and pursue peace and reconciliation
- To strive to safeguard the integrity of creation, and sustain and renew the life of the earth

These 5 marks of mission are only a very 'broad brush' statement. Each Anglican parish or group throughout the world has the exciting and demanding task of discerning with the help of the Holy Spirit what specifically God is asking of them in mission. We have this task as a parish this year and every year.

Interpreting the Book of Acts

- 3.1. We can learn a great deal about the mission of the early Church from the book of Acts, but as we read this book we have a major hermeneutical (interpretive) issue to address. If Acts is the story of the early Church, we need to work out what in that story is simply narrative (an account of what happened in a particular way in the life of the Church in that time and place and could possibly have happened in a different way) and what is normative (what is essential to the life, nature and growth of the Church as a sign of the reign of God). After all, we are separated from the early Church by language, culture, geography and time, so our circumstances are very different from those of the early Church. But if we can identify what is presented in Acts as normative we can identify what we should still aim to be doing as the Church in the 21st century.
- 3.2. Some minor principles of normativity include the principle that anything normative must not contradict a clear teaching from elsewhere in Scripture, the distinction between a command in the text and a narrative description, and reinforcement of a teaching in the rest of the Bible. A major principle of normativity relates to consistency with core theological points that Luke conveys elsewhere in Luke/Acts.

What does the Book of Acts present as normative for the mission of the Church?

- 4.1. There is of course a range of scholarly opinions on the topic of what is normative (see, e.g., Roland Allen's notable study (reprinted in 1962) or Fee & Stuart (1993). Scheepers (2010) gives the following list (which we will examine in small groups):

Mission is initiated, empowered and directed by the Holy Spirit (1:8; 4:8; 13:1-3; 16:7; cf Luke 3:21-22; 4:1-2, 14-15). Therefore prayer is essential to mission. Prayer was also fundamental to Jesus' life and witness/mission (e.g. Luke 6:12-13; 9:18; 11:1; 22:39-46).

Mission is witness to the resurrected Christ (1:8; 2:32; 4:10; 5:30; 7:56; 10:40; 13:30; 22:15; 22:20) and the presentation of the Gospel demands a specific response, namely repentance and turning to Christ (2:37-40). The implication is that there is no fully Christian mission without the risen Christ being at the centre of it.

The Church is both a point of departure and the destination of mission. Local churches send people on mission (our word 'mission' is derived from the Latin word for 'send'), and the establishment of local churches is the outcome of mission. Those sent on mission are received back into their churches. The mission of the Church is fundamentally communal.

Mission involves the crossing of borders/overcoming of divisions (10:9-23; 11:1-3; 17:16-34; cf. Gal. 3:28; Col. 3:11; Mark 7:24-30; Luke 7:1-10; 10:29-37; 17:11-19). As a consequence, challenges and opposition are likely even from within the Church (Acts 15:1-5). Jesus himself crossed boundaries in spending time with sinners, and was opposed for this by people within his own religious setting (e.g. Luke 5:30-32; 15:1-2).

Mission requires faith and courage in the face of adversity. While the early Church spread rapidly, it spread in the face of strong resistance (6:8-7:60; 8:1; 9:23-25; 13:50-51; 14:1-7; 17:5; 19:23-41), and partly because of persecution (8:1, 4-8; 13:50-51; 14:20). The early Christians expected persecution (Matt. 5:12; John 15:20) but that did not stop them from bearing witness to Christ (14:22). While opposition to mission is normal, it is not absolutely guaranteed. However, Acts clearly shows us the best possible response to opposition and persecution: steadfast faith in God, prayer and perseverance under all circumstances (4:23-31; 13:51-52; 14:7; 16:25).

5 What are some implications of this for us and for our church fellowship?

5.1. Please discuss in small groups:

- a) If mission is initiated, empowered and directed by the Holy Spirit, what does this mean for the place of prayer in our church/parish life and in our plans for the ongoing development of the parish? What are some practices we should initiate/develop/continue in the parish to reflect the Holy Spirit's role in mission? How might you be involved in these practices?
- b) What does it mean for you that Jesus has been raised from the dead? What does it mean for our wider society/the wider world? What are some ways that you think our parish/you could better witness to the resurrected Christ?
- c) What are some ways in which our individualistic culture conflicts with the values of the Gospel/early Church? What are some things we should be doing in our life together as a parish to be a sign of the reign of God? How does this confirm or differ from what we are doing now?
- d) If the Gospel challenges aspects of our general culture it must surely also challenge aspects of our church/religious culture. What boundaries/divisions do you think we need to stand up against in society as an expression of God's mission to the world?

What boundaries/ divisions do we need to let go of as a parish to better proclaim and enact the reign of God?

- e) If mission involves opposition, why do it? Don't we have enough challenges in our lives already? What might some of the 'gifts' of suffering be? (Give personal examples if you can.) Do you think we are called to suffer as part of our witness to Christ?. If so, what are some implications of this calling for us as a parish?

6 Conclusion

- 6.1. These are far from being the only questions the Book of Acts asks of us in relation to God's mission and ours. I hope that we will journey together more 'missionally' in our parish life this year. The Book of Acts will be one of our chief resources for this journey.

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Session 4: Healing in the Acts of the Apostles (Derek Lightbourne)

Introductory – being prepared for ministry

Healings were an important feature of Jesus' earthly ministry and there are at least 26 accounts of people being healed. Indeed more, depending on one's definition of healing. Having called 12 to be apostles (= sent) Jesus was intent on 'training' them and other followers to continue this ministry. We read in the gospels of accounts of 12 and 70 sent to 'cure people and say to them the kingdom of God has come near you.' Furthermore he gave them 'power and authority' in exercising this ministry. Thus the disciples not only observed how Jesus went about this but also had opportunity to learn by doing. This was not always successful as they were unable to help a man whose son was possessed by demons (Luke 9.37 – 43). When they asked Jesus about this he explained that faith and prayer were important aspects. Then after the 70 who were sent out did exercise this ministry and then returned 'successful' in ministry by the 'power of the name of Jesus', he reminded them to keep humble (Luke 10.17 – 20).

Healing in context

1. 'Signs and wonders' (2.43, 14.3, 15.12). After Jesus' ascension and the Pentecost experience, Luke several times refers to healings and other 'power ministry' as 'signs

and wonders'. These were intended as examples of the kingdom or rule of God coming on earth. Luke describes: 'With great power the apostles gave their testimony to the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them (4.33). The idyllic description of life among the believers (2.43 – 47) in those earliest days following Pentecost included healings and other unexpected demonstrations of the power of God through the Holy Spirit. These 'signs and wonders' continued with Paul's ministry (14.3).

2. *The 'ripple' effect of a healing* (3.1 – 4.23). Whilst the man with the disability doesn't show evidence of faith, Peter and John certainly displayed faith as they exercised the authority of the name of Jesus to heal the man. ('In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth...'). In other instances the person with the need was seen to have faith to be healed (Acts 14.8 Paul at Lystra) The accounts of healing became a part of the kerygma, the testimony, as Peter explained when brought before the Council of the Sadducees (3.11 – 26 and 4.5 – 22).
3. *A prayer for healing* (4.23 – 31). After a warning from the authorities Peter and John report to the gathered disciples and together they pray a power-full prayer. The prayer includes petition for the healing ministry to continue. Here is an important prayer in praying for healing today. Note the format:
 - Address to God
 - Explanation of the situation of need
 - How previous prayer had been answered
 - The present petition
 - The prayer is made in the name of Jesus
 - Prayer receives several responses
4. *The power of presence* (5.12 – 16 Peter's shadow and Paul's handkerchiefs 19.11). We may not think of it as being significant yet how important it can be to simply 'be' in the presence of another in caring and quiet prayer. This is an important pastoral ministry including in a healing context. Likewise the encouragement toward a persons healing and wellness with items like flowers or cards sent. In the healing process there are most often contributory factors towards the healing and not only one person's actions.
5. *Reluctant healer* (9.10 -19 Ananias). Here Ananias is called by God through a dream but is hesitant to go bearing in mind Saul-Paul's earlier actions against the believers. Ananias is obedient and on entering the house explains 'The Lord Jesus...has sent me so that you may regain your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit.' There are times when we may be called to make contact with and minister to another despite our disinclinations. A helpful guide in this is to 'trust your intuition – it may be God is wanting to use you in a caring way. As we are there for others in mission (beyond the church community membership) so it may be that another comes our way and it is for us to accept and welcome that person.

6. *Shared ministry* (3.1 – 10, 9.32 – 35, 14.8 – 10, 9.36 – 42, 20.7 – 12). Just as the 70 were sent out two by two, so this followed in the early church – Peter and John, Paul and Silas, Paul and Luke (on Malta, Acts 28), Paul and Barnabas 13.3). In healing ministry this can be helpful as prayers prayed are complementary to each other. One can speak a word of prayer and one can be listening (to God).
7. *Pastoral ministry* (28.7 – 10). There's a significant precedent we also recognise in healing prayer and pastoral ministry today. Paul and Luke are on Malta and go to local mayor Publius' father. Luke and Paul visit and Paul prays and lays on hands (James 5) and the man is 'cured' (iaomai). Then Luke notes others ('with diseases') on the island and they are 'cured' (therapeuo) by physician Luke's ministry. Thus as is so often the believer's experience that prayer and medical assistance play their part in coming to wellness.

Concluding: Important considerations for healing ministry today

- Holy Spirit context
- Faith, in the name of Jesus
- A way of praying (prayer of empathy)
- The power of presence
- Testimony (to encourage)
- Prayer and pastoral interweaving

Question for discussion: In what ways do you consider God acts in healing in these days?