

## Luke – Acts

This month we remain with Acts for our Epistle reading, while our gospels will be from John.

Our first reading is of the story of Peter and Cornelius, a story Luke tells us twice! Luke tells the story in chapter 10, and then he has Peter telling us what has happened in chapter 11. It is Peter's account we will hear. Why does Luke repeat the story? Perhaps he thought that it was such an important story he wanted to emphasise it through repetition.

Acts is the story of the beginning of the church, but equally importantly it is the story of the bringing of the good news of the gospel to the gentiles. Jesus, and Luke's gospel is set in the world of Israel and Judaism. Luke's gospel begins and ends in Jerusalem, the centre of the Jewish world. Acts takes us from Jerusalem to Rome, the centre of the political world. The good news reaches the centre of the everyday world of humanity.

For us, two thousand years later, it is an obvious jump. *“Jesus died for all the children ... red and yellow, black and white ...”*. But then, for the Jewish disciples, for the church that was at its very beginning, it demanded a leap of viewpoint, from the known and obvious to one that was strange and alien.

The Jews knew that they were *the chosen people*, primarily God was for them. What they were less aware of was their role in the world as witness to their God. For Peter, this change comes through a vision from God, and his encounter with Cornelius the Roman centurion. Without this meeting between Jew and gentile, Christianity might have remained a Jewish sect.

*“And as I began to speak, the Holy Spirit fell upon them just as it had upon us at the beginning. ... If then God gave them the same gift that he gave us when we believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could hinder God. When they heard this, they were silenced. And they praised God, saying, “Then God has given even to the Gentiles the repentance that leads to life.”*

It is because of this meeting between Peter and Cornelius that Paul can engage in his life's work, as missionary to the gentiles. Without this meeting, perhaps we would not be the Burnham on Sea part of the body of Christ.

Our next two readings tell us of Paul's ever-widening missionary journeying. He is in Asia, but a man in a vision calls him to Macedonia – Greece. The gospel is to be spread ever eastwards.

Here, our readings give us the immediacy of eyewitness reporting. It is as if we are given pages from Luke's diary to read. Luke travels in the boat with Paul. He goes searching for a place of prayer on the Sabbath. They sit by the river and talk to a group of women, and so Lydia and all her household hear the *word*, and are later baptized. Luke, Paul and their companions are invited to stay with Lydia in her home (Acts 19:9-15).

Luke is with Paul when Paul heals the slave girl, but unlike Paul and Silas he is not dragged off to meet the magistrates in the market place, he is not given a severe flogging and sent to prison (Acts 19:16-34). And so, for the second half of this story we return to “they ...” But those parts that we hear through “we ...” give it a vivid reality that carries us into the rest of the account. Luke was there ... .

We end the month and our readings from Acts with Pentecost (Acts 2:1-21), and so we return to the beginning and the gift of the Holy Spirit. Luke's story is not so much the story of Paul's missionary work taking the gospel to Rome, it is rather the story of the gift of the Holy Spirit moving in ever-widening circles.

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