

Luke, New beginnings: Resurrection and Acts

Why do you look for the living among the dead? This is the question that the women at the tomb are asked. They run off to share the news with the disciples. And so, Easter Day begins the story of a new way of transformed life, following God through belief in his risen son, Jesus, who is now recognised as the *Christ* (*Messiah* in Hebrew).

Our gospel readings this month are from John, but instead of an epistle we hear stories from *the Acts of the Apostles*, of the new beginning, the fledgling church. *Acts* is the second part of Luke's writing. Luke never intended his gospel to stand on its own. For Luke, Jesus is the centre of history. Before him we have the Old Testament. After his resurrection, we have the Church. To hear the story of Pentecost we must wait for the fifty days to pass which for the disciples was a time of waiting and prayer. While we wait, we are given some of *Acts* highlights. This month we hear two of Peter's "sermons", and then two stories.

Peter preached his first sermon on the day of Pentecost. But, we begin the month with the occasion when Peter for the first time fully realises that the gospel is of wider significance than simply a call to Jews to renewal. Peter has been sent to Cornelius, a Roman centurion, a gentile: *I truly understand that God shows no partiality ... everyone who believes in him (Jesus) receives forgiveness of sins through his name* (10:34, 43).

The following week we hear Peter preach his defence in front of the religious authorities. He is bound to preach because he is a witness to the death and resurrection of Jesus, and to the Holy Spirit *whom God has given to those who obey him* (5:32). Jesus' resurrection has ushered in a new age of forgiveness and transformed life that is of universal significance.

Saul is very much of the old life, a fervent Jew, who is *breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord* (9:1) This unlikely man is to become the primary missionary to the gentiles, and so it is the story of his conversion that we hear next.

For our final story this month we return to Peter, and to the healing of Tabitha. Here we see the good news of Jesus is not just a verbal message, but a practical one of healing and wholeness. Empowered by the Holy Spirit, through prayer, Peter continues to follow in the footsteps of the man that he watched and followed in life. Though Peter had deserted in Jesus' hour of need, through his experience of forgiveness through the risen Lord he now continues to follow Christ in both word and deed.

Mary Witts.