

An encounter and an opportunity

You probably know that the church follows a lectionary which gives bible readings for every service both weekday and Sunday. On Sunday we have a choice of 4 readings and we used to have two and to suit our filmed services just one and often we have the Gospel reading.

I was looking at the readings from Easter through to Pentecost.

If you have just the Gospel readings, then the focus is on the disciples and essential teaching about being disciples (for example last week Revd. Terry spoke on Thomas).

Good Shepherd
The Vine and the branches
Remain in my love
Prayer for Disciples

And it concludes at Pentecost with Jesus saying the Holy Spirit; the Counsellor was coming.

As disciples and followers of Jesus Christ these passages are about developing our understanding of ourselves in relationship to the risen Lord Jesus and the expectation of His life in us through the gift of His Spirit.

If though you follow the readings from the book of Acts – you dive straight into the outcome of Jesus resurrection, and the gift of the Spirit at Pentecost.

In the Gospels we are looking inward; our relationship with Christ. In Acts we are looking outward; this is the outcome – this is what happened next.

Revd. Jon Hutchinson, 18 April 2021

Had we heard the reading from Acts on Easter Sunday, we would have heard St. Peter preaching the Gospel to gentiles. Last week how the impact of Christ's resurrection created a new community, one that shared everything together, selling possessions and sharing everything.

This week we see that the life of Jesus continues through the disciples as they do what Jesus did, the lame man is healed and Peter takes the opportunity to preach.

Next week we find that Peter and John are before the Sanhedrin and Jane will be preaching on that passage, but it shows that this new born church continue the conflict Jesus had with the religious authorities.

Then a curious story the Gilly is speaking about away from the crowds and the 1000's in Jerusalem – Philip speaks to one man on the road from Jerusalem to Gaza.

Then – whoever organises the readings has had to backtrack a bit to give the passages on the Holy Spirit and what happened at Pentecost.

So we jump about in the timeline and have stories from Jerusalem and from elsewhere. 1000's hearing the message and responding, one man hears the message and responds. The new community of the church is born with a radical love and acceptance for each other and if it all feels a bit chaotic, hectic and unplanned and it was!! The life of God being seen in the followers of Jesus and the kingdom of God appearing here, there and everywhere.

Today is the day of our annual meeting and as part of that we reflect on last year. I've been looking at the report (that I wrote) through the lens of the book of Acts.

We could tell the story of Holy Trinity in 2020 in a very similar style to the book of Acts and with similar outcomes.

God's people, finding themselves in all manner of unusual situations, empowered by His Spirit caring for one another, caring for those in need, sharing freely, giving generously, doing new things! Recording music, preaching, leading, film making being a phone buddy to a stranger...finding a way to be the church and to live the good-news in an extra-ordinary situation.

There is also another parallel between our experience and the early church. That of fear. The reason the Gospel spread all over the place is that the religious authorities stamped down hard and the Christians were spread far and wide from Jerusalem. They lived in fear of arrest, imprisonment and death – chief protagonist against the church was Saul. Another story for another day.

We too have lived in a climate of fear. It has radically altered our lives and activity and ways of being community. But like the first Christians, God has faithfully kept his promises. Jesus said to his disciples. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.

On two occasions in 2020 I had to leave Katherine at hospital and I didn't know whether I would see her again. I can tell you on those two days, my heart was not troubled and I was not afraid. And the occasion when they thought Katherine had a blood clot on the lung which is life threatening, she also was held by God and her heart wasn't troubled and she wasn't afraid. Neither of us are super-heroes and we are not spiritual gurus who can show you how to have a lasting peace. We can tell you about the love of God the Father, the saving grace of Jesus the Son and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. Then again, so can all of you.

Our story from Acts today is of an encounter and an opportunity.

Peter and John are heading to the temple to pray and there is the beggar, as usual, begging. Chances are he was there when Jesus came to the temple. Chances are Peter and John have seen him before – but on this day the Holy Spirit plants a certainty in Peter's mind and in the name of Jesus the man is healed.

A crowd gathers – they all know this man, and Peter seizes the opportunity. I just want to say one thing about his impromptu sermon

(This picture inserted)

Peter speaks to the onlookers

¹¹ While the man held on to Peter and John, all the people were astonished and came running to them in the place called Solomon's Colonnade. ¹² When Peter saw this, he said to them: 'Fellow Israelites, why does this surprise you? Why do you stare at us as if by our own power or godliness we had made this man walk? ¹³ The God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the God of our fathers, has glorified his servant Jesus. You handed him over to be killed, and you disowned him before Pilate, though he had decided to let him go. ¹⁴ You disowned the Holy and Righteous One and asked that a murderer be released to you. ¹⁵ You killed the author of life, but God raised him from the dead. We are witnesses of this. ¹⁶ By faith in the name of Jesus, this man whom you see and know was made strong. It is Jesus' name and the faith that comes through him that has completely healed him, as you can all see.

¹⁷ 'Now, fellow Israelites, I know that you acted in ignorance, as did your leaders. ¹⁸ But this is how God fulfilled what he had foretold through all the prophets, saying that his Messiah would suffer. ¹⁹ Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord,

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It was relevant for that crowd in that place on that day. These were the same people who had taken part in Good Friday and Peter doesn't hold back. Look how often he says YOU.

You handed him over
You disowned him
You killed the author of life
You, You, You.

But then it changes.

This man who **you see and know**
As **you can all see**
Repent then and turn to God so that **your sins may be wiped out**, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord.

Later at the APCM I'll introduce the Transforming Trinity booklet and at its heart it's about the Gospel. It's about creating a place of encounter and the opportunity to share what we know and have in Christ Jesus with those yet to experience his love, grace, forgiveness and healing.

As disciples we pay attention to our relationship with the risen Christ and who we are in Him. As followers we look for encounter and opportunity to speak of Jesus Christ to a world in need of healing. Peter tells of what he knows and what Jesus has done, we tell of what we know and what is doing in our lives.

Let us pray.

Father we thank you for your faithfulness to us and how you give peace in troubled times and hope when all seems bleak.

Revd. Jon Hutchinson, 18 April 2021

As we hear again how your church was bursting with life and joy and hope and expectation despite severe persecution, grant us the courage to fulfil your calling to be your church and to proclaim Christ Jesus our risen Lord.

Equip us for the challenges ahead, unite us closely together in bonds of love and lead us by your Spirit in all we do.

We ask this for Jesus glory.

Amen.