

Bible Study Group
Book of Acts
Tuesdays, 11.00-noon/Lyall Church
May 10-14 (six sessions, or maybe seven)

The Book of Acts tells the story of the Holy Spirit's work in human lives, following the death and resurrection of Jesus. Strictly speaking, what is presented are not the acts of the apostles, for only a handful of apostles are featured in the many stories. That is why it is better to understand this book as the Acts of the Holy Spirit, who continues and expands the mission and ministry of Jesus.

What we encounter over and over is the theme of the Holy Spirit breaking down cultural, economic, political and religious barriers. The Holy Spirit breaks down these barriers and then has a unifying redemptive impact based on the core teachings of Jesus. Hence, the main theme of the book is: God's work to unify a kingdom people—a new community is emerging. The forces of established religion and the Roman State are, of course, threatened by this emerging reality and see those following the Holy Spirit as traitors to their well-established order and control. People need to know their place, and the state and the established religious authorities will be all too happy to tell you exactly where your place is. Those in power have walls to protect against this threat and will defend their own interests with breathtaking brutality. It is a classic struggle pitting the power of the kingdom of God against the powers of the state, established religion, cultural norms, mores, folkways and worldviews. There have always been caste systems in this world; the Holy Spirit will have none of it.

When Jesus dies on the cross, the curtain of the Temple in Jerusalem is torn from top to bottom, meaning God is not located in a single place, but is on the loose throughout the known world and beyond. Even more, we discover what is unleashed that day is the Holy Spirit, somehow in tune with the same Spirit in human beings. Like tuning forks, the Holy Spirit from without moves the Holy Spirit from within and a kind of holy synergy emerges, causing a wave of healing, redemption, forgiveness and community. As we know from history, the Holy Spirit will shake things up and reestablish a new story for the human family. The Church will be established through the Spirit, creating an alternative community to the established religious and political order. A new day is dawning for the human family and everyone is invited to ride this train (See Exodus: a mixed multitude leave Egypt). Lives are no longer forever stuck and atrophied, God is doing something new, opening unending possibilities for everyone.

“I will bless you, and you shall become a blessing, and through you all the nations shall bless themselves.” This is the original covenant God made with Abraham way back in Genesis 12. The book of Acts is a witness that this foundational covenant has now come to be.

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If these events happened two thousand years ago, then why should the reader care? What difference does it make? What's the big deal? What could this possibly have to do with my own life? These are classic theological questions, posed without varnish. But these questions push us to see the stories and the entire bible as living stories to be claimed and carried forward in our own age and time.

You see, the same Spirit that moved people so long ago, now wants to move each generation. Thus it is now our turn to live lives of the Spirit together.

Who is in and who is outside the love of God? What sort of world view will bring us to a blessed end of history? Can God bring down barriers and create a new humanity? What sort of boundaries are appropriate and healthy, and what are not? Can those who are powerful change their minds and hearts? Where am I on this score? Do my boundaries look like a wall topped with razor wire, or are they made of brick, or of putty, or are they filled with holes? Whom do I allow into my life? Whom do I keep away? Does God want me to reevaluate my own boundaries on the basis of the life, teaching, death and resurrection of Jesus? The book of Acts will offer us many stories to examine these matters and more.

There are many fabulous stories in the book of Acts and we'll only be able to cover some of them. I do encourage each of you to read the entire book, preferably at one sitting. If that is too much then I'd like you to come having read each session's prescribed passage. That will really help us leave the tarmac and get into cruising altitude. Thanks ever so much for your willingness to share your mind, heart and faith! Thanks to Jim Demus for being my partner in teaching! Below is the schedule and the passages we'll be considering.

Week #1: May 10, 2022 Acts 1.1-26

Week #2: May 17, 2022 Acts 2.1-13; Acts 2.37-47

Week #3: May 24, 2022 Acts 4.32-37; 7.54-8.3

Week #4: May 31, 2022 Acts 9.1-31

Week #5: June 7, 2022 Acts 10.34-11.18

Week #6: June 14, 2022 Acts 15.1-21

Week #7: June 21, 2022 (OPTIONAL) Acts 16.11-40