

## August – September 2019

*The Rector writes:*

### ***‘A great adventure!’***



As a young boy growing up in Coventry one of the highlights of my week was going home to James Murphy's house after Evensong on Sunday. Here we shared lemonade and biscuits and settled down to listen to 'Mr Jim' as he told us the most amazing and exciting stories of adventure – he spun yarns about riots, prison breaks, earthquakes, shipwrecks, miracles and all manner of things which excited young choirboys of my generation. It was only later as I grew up that I began to realise they were mostly stories from the Acts of the Apostles. What Jim Murphy was doing in his own wonderful inimitable way was to excite us young boys about the church.

The Acts of the Apostles is a wonderful book to read, an action packed story of the events that took place after the death and resurrection of Jesus. The book is attributed to St Luke, the doctor and companion of St Paul and the writer of the third gospel. If Luke's gospel is about the birth of Christianity, then his follow up work is about the birth of the Church.

In Acts we read about the exploits of the apostles, the coming of the Holy Spirit, the life of St Paul, and the spread of the Christian gospel throughout the world. It is not always an easy read, nor does it describe an easy journey. There are some lengthy theological speeches and arguments which proclaim that Jesus is the Messiah, and that following him brings life and hope to the world. Not everyone listened and some took exception to this message. Christians were martyred (Stephen in Acts 6:8 – 8:3), imprisoned (Peter in Acts 12) and beaten (Paul in Acts 21, 22). There was some falling out and disagreement between different factions in the church (Acts 15), and difficulty in accepting new practices and ideas (Acts 10). But there were also the startling stories of conversion (Acts 2, Acts 8, Acts 9) and growth (evidenced in most of Paul's journeys).

Many of the problems that beset the church today are seen in the stories of the early church in Acts. Perhaps reading about them might help us to work out ways to deal with our problems and disputes both within and outside the church!

So, why did those early disciples carry on? And how did they manage to build a church? The answer lies in the other great theme of Acts – The Holy Spirit. As the story unfolds we are constantly reminded of the work the Holy Spirit is doing – inspiring, protecting, punishing, informing, guiding and directing the early church and its leaders and members to ever greater lengths as they spread the good news of Jesus Christ.

That same Holy Spirit is given to us today – each year at the Feast of Pentecost as a church we celebrate the coming of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2).

The Spirit continues to work in and through all those who put their trust in him – and continues to work miracles, to change hearts and minds, to strengthen, guide and direct the church. Yet like some in the early days of the church we are not sure about the Holy Spirit. Perhaps we are worried by the changes that we might face as a church or as individuals, perhaps concerned about or doubting some of the manifestations of the Holy Spirit (such as prophecy or tongues). But this is the Holy Spirit of God – the helper promised by Jesus when he returned to his Father. How much more might we achieve if we really were open to the work and power of Spirit in the world and the church today?

So if you are looking for an exciting holiday read this year, why not try the Acts of the Apostles, and start thinking about how we might share a similar adventure as the church today!

Yours in Christ

Reverend John, your Rector.