

And You Will Be My Witnesses – Acts of the Apostles – Week Two

Last week we discussed how the Holy Spirit inspired the disciples and led to an exponential growth in the community. Our conversation also included sharing stories of our own personal encounters with the Holy Spirit.

This week we'll look at chapters five through eight and note the challenges growth brings. There will be crises within the church as different types of people join the Jesus movement, and there will be conflicts with the authorities who are wary of this new and unpredictable community.

Stephen's martyrdom will present the church with a major turning point and we will see how God can use a tragedy to further the message of Jesus Christ. As Michael W. Foss writes in *From Members to Disciples*: "We worship a God of new beginnings ... not dead ends."

Foss goes on to say: "Discipleship dares to grow Christ's church by growing Christ's people. Then the Holy Spirit, as we have seen in Acts 8, will lead the people of God into the world to witness to the truth of the Messiah in word and deed."

Key Questions – Have you ever had a crisis become an opportunity for ministry? Also, what opportunities for new ministry might the pandemic present St. Anne's?

Key Greek Phrase -- *martyr*. We find this word in Acts 1:8 when Jesus tells the disciples that they will be his witnesses, his martyrs. The word has its roots in the legal field but was carried over in Christianity to include those who witness to Christ by their acts, or by giving their lives.

Ceslas Spicq, writing in his amazing lexicon, says the following: "The biblical *martyr* is not a mere eyewitness, simply present at a happening: he is active, called upon to tell what he has seen and heard, to proclaim what he knows."

In one sense, Acts could be called The Book of the Witnesses.