

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

This week brings us two transformative moments. First, there is Saul's encounter with the Risen Christ on the road to Damascus. The firebrand Pharisee was on a mission to arrest Christians. Instead, he became one.

This story is followed by Peter's trip to the home of Cornelius, a Roman centurion. Once again, the Holy Spirit is at work, sending the believers into uncharted territory. Where once they may have been content to preach to fellow Jews, now they will become apostles to the Gentiles. Of course, there will be conflict. A paradigm shift is never easy.

The events of chapters nine through twelve bring several thoughts and questions to mind. First, do not assume that you would be on the right side of history. You might have sided with the believers who did not want to minister to the Gentiles.

Questions:

When has God called you into a ministry outside of your comfort zone? How did you react?

What would be a challenging outreach ministry for St. Anne's?

Cornelius prayed to receive Peter's ministry. Who might be praying to receive the ministry of St. Anne's?

Biblical connections

One of the valuable parts of Bible study is to become aware of the many connections and themes found in scripture. Luke-Acts provides a wonderful opportunity for this endeavor. Here are just a few from our readings.

In Luke 21:12-15, Jesus says his disciples will be arrested and handed "over to synagogues and prisons, and you will be brought before kings and governors because of my name." This is exactly what happens in Acts 4:1-22. But, the connections do not stop with this scene. Note what Peter and John say in Acts 4:20, then turn to the opening verse of the First Letter of John: "We declare to you what was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our own eyes ..."

During the last supper, Jesus, knowing what is to come, prays that Peter's faith will not be destroyed, but that it will remain after the three denials. "Simon, Simon, listen! Satan has demanded to sift all of you like wheat, but I have prayed for you

[that you will] strengthen your brothers.” Luke 22:31-32. Isn’t this what we see happening in the opening chapters of Acts? Peter, the one-time coward, becomes a champion of the faith.

His encounter with Cornelius highlights another controversial New Testament theme, the crossing of boundaries and table fellowship with non-Jews. Recall the critique of Jesus in Luke 15:2: “And the Pharisees and the scribes were grumbling and saying, ‘This fellow welcomes sinners and eats with them.’”

Upon returning from the home of Cornelius, Peter is asked: “Why did you go to uncircumcised men and eat with them?” -- Acts 11:3.

In Galatians 2:11-14, we read Paul’s description of Peter’s waffling faith: “for until certain people came from James, he used to eat with the Gentiles. But after they came, he drew back and kept himself separate for fear of the circumcision faction.”

These are just a few of the countless examples found in the Bible. The main goal is to see the larger scope of God’s story of salvation and to see how his Spirit works in our lives.

Grace and peace,

Fr. Dion