

MISSION IMPOSSIBLE?
The Word of God and Evangelisation Today
 Holy Cross College 2019
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www.tarsus.ie

The First Christian History: the Acts of the Apostles

Learning today from the very first generations

Programme

1. Introduction to the Acts (p. 1)
2. Pentecost tableau (p. 8)
3. Speeches in Acts (p. 14)
4. Conversion of Cornelius (p. 18)
5. Paul in Athens (p. 23)
6. Paul in Rome (p. 28)

The
ACTS
 of the
 Apostles

1. Introduction to the Acts

- First of all
- Two "big" stories
- Getting started
- History?
- Date, authorship, location
- Prayer / Conversation

First of all...

- The world of Acts
- Our world(s)!!!
- This is a rattling good story, full of excitement and drama.
- Plenty of friendship
- Plenty of conflict
- Two "big" stories with lots of little stories around as well...
- Two "big" stories: Peter and Paul
- Two volumes: Gospel and Acts together
- Starts in Jerusalem and ends in Rome.
- Really the story of Peter and then Paul; Peter peters out.
- Large biblical theology of history, found chiefly in the speeches.
- About one third of Acts is made up of speeches.
- The break with Judaism and the inclusion of the Gentiles.
- The "we" passages in Acts.
- The vast number of characters.
- Certain scenes receive extensive treatment (Cornelius; the journey to Rome).
- Ends happily, but strangely without closure.

Two "big" stories

Two volumes: Gospel and Acts together

Preface	Luke 1:1-4
Part I The time of Israel reaches its climax	Luke 1:5-2:52
Part II The time of Jesus	Luke 3:1-Acts 1:26
Part III The time of the Church	Acts 2:1-28:31

The Acts as a whole

Transition to Part III	Acts 1:1-26
Petrine Christianity Jewish mission from Jerusalem to Antioch	Acts 2-12
Pauline Christianity Gentile mission from Antioch to Rome	Acts 13-28

The story of Peter

Christian beginnings in Jerusalem	Acts 2:1-8:1
The church expands to Samaria and beyond	Acts 8:2-40
Conversion of Paul	Acts 9:1-31
Key scenes: Peter, the conversion of Cornelius, and the formation of the Antioch church	Acts 9:32-12:25

The story of Paul

Gentile mission Promoted from Antioch	Acts 13-14
Gentile mission Confirmed in Jerusalem	Acts 15:1-35
Gentile mission Return to Jerusalem	Acts 15:36-21:16
Jerusalem arrest Long journey to Rome	Acts 21:17-28:31

Getting started

Second Volume

Same author, time and place

Acts: 28 chapters long

ad 30 to ad 64 – about 35 years

Lots and lots of characters (next slide)

Lots of different kinds of writing

Cast of Characters

A

Aeneas (9:33)

Agabus (11:28; 21:10)

Ananias and Sapphira (5:1, 3, 5)

Ananias of Damascus (9:10, 12-13, 17; 22:12)

Ananias High Priest (22:12; 23:2; 24:1)

Annas (4:6)

Antonius Felix (23:24, 26; 24:22, 24-25, 27; 25:14)

Aristarchus of Thessalonica (19:29)

B

Barnabas (4:36; 9:27; 11:22, 25, 30; 12:25-13:2; 13:7, 42-43, 46, 50; 14:1, 12, 14, 20; 15:2, 12, 22, 25, 35-37, 39)

Blastus (12:20)

C

Cornelius the Centurion (10:1, 3, 17, 22, 24-25, 30-31)

Crispus (18:8)

D

Damaris (17:34)
Demetrius (19:24, 38)
Dionysius the Areopagite (17:34)
Dorcus (9:36, 39)
Drusilla (24:24)

E

Egyptian (prophet)
Elymas (13:8)
Erastus (19:22)
Ethiopian eunuch (8:27, 34, 36-39)
Eutychus (20:9)

F

Porcius Festus (24:27-25:1; 25:4, 9, 12-14, 22-24; 26:24-25, 32)

G

Gaius (19:29; 20:4)
Gamaliel (5:34; 22:3)

H

Herod Agrippa (25:13, 22-24, 26; 26:1-2, 19, 27-28, 32)

J

James, brother of Jesus (15:13; 21:18)
James, brother of John (1:13; 12:2)
James of Alphaeus (1:13)
Jason of Thessalonica (17:6-7, 9)
John Mark (Acts 12:12, 25; 15:37, 39)
Joseph Barsabbas (1:23)
Joseph Barnabas (4:36)
Judas Barsabbas (15:22)
Judas (1:16, 25)
Judas of Galilee (15:37)
Judas son of James (1:13)
Lucius Junius Gallio Annaeanus (18:12, 14, 17)
Justus of Jerusalem (1:23)

L

Lucius of Cyrene (13:1)
Lydia of Thyatira (16:4)
Claudius Lysias (23:26; 24:22)

M**Kind of writing**

Introduction
 Symbolic scenes
 Short stories
 Letters
 Speeches
 Proclamations
 Debates
 Persecution
 Martyrdom

Simon Magus (8:9, 13, 18, 24)
Simon the Tanner (9:43)
Mary, mother of Jesus (1:14)
Mary, mother of John Mark (12:12)
Matthias (1:23, 26)
Mnason of Cyprus (21:16)

P

Paul (x 139)
Peter (x 59)
Philip the Apostle (1:13)
Philip the Deacon (6:1-7) = *Philip the Evangelist* (8:5-6, 12-13, 26, 29-31, 34-35, 38-40; 21:8)
Pontius Pilate (3:13; 4:27; 13:28)
Priscilla and Aquila (18:2, 18, 26)
Prochorus deacon (6:5)
Publius (28:7, 8)

R

Rhoda (12:13)

S

Saul (7:58; 8:1, 3; 9:1, 4, 8, 11, 17, 22, 24; 11:25, 30; 12:25-13:2; 13:7, 9, 21; 22:7, 13; 26:14)
Sceva (19:4)
Sergius Paulus (13:7)
Seven Deacons (6:5)
Simeon Niger (13:1)
Simeon = Peter (15:14)
Simon = Peter (10:5, 18, 32; 11:13)
Sopater of Beroea (20:4)
Sosthenes synagogue official (18:17)
Stephen (6:5, 8-9; 7:2, 54, 59; 8:2; 11:19; 22:20)

T

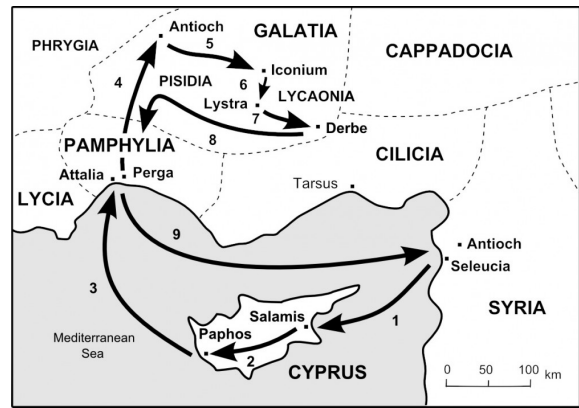
Tertullus (24:1-2)
Theophilus (1:1)
Theudas (5:36)
Titius Justus (18:7)
Trophimus (20:4; 21:29)
Twelve Apostles (1:13)
Tychicus (20:4)

Dreams
 Miraculous escapes
 Meetings
 Disputes
 Travels
 Trials
 Shipwreck
 And so on...

First missionary journey

Acts 13-14

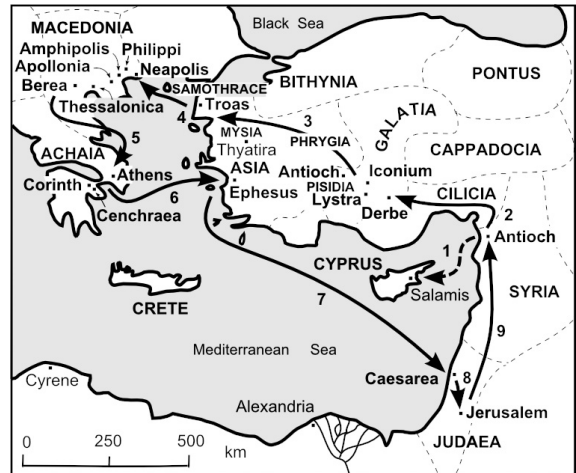
So, being sent out by the Holy Spirit, they went down to Seleucia; and from there they sailed to Cyprus. When they arrived at Salamis, they proclaimed the word of God in the synagogues of the Jews. And they had John also to assist them. When they had gone through the whole island as far as Paphos, they met a certain magician, a Jewish false prophet, named Bar-Jesus. (Acts 13:4-6)



Second missionary journey

Acts 15:36-18:22

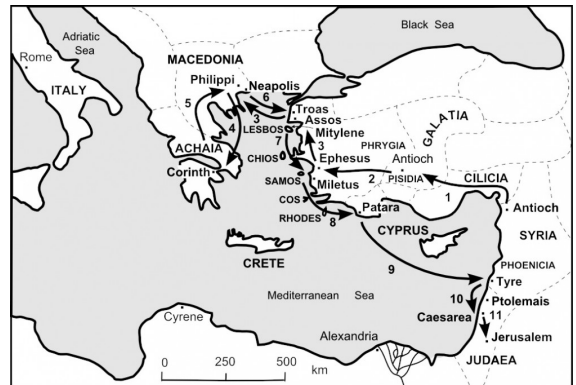
After some days Paul said to Barnabas, "Come, let us return and visit the believers in every city where we proclaimed the word of the Lord and see how they are doing." Barnabas wanted to take with them John called Mark. But Paul decided not to take with them one who had deserted them in Pamphylia and had not accompanied them in the work. The disagreement became so sharp that they parted company; Barnabas took Mark with him and sailed away to Cyprus. (Acts 15:36-39)



Third missionary journey

Acts 18:23 to 21:17

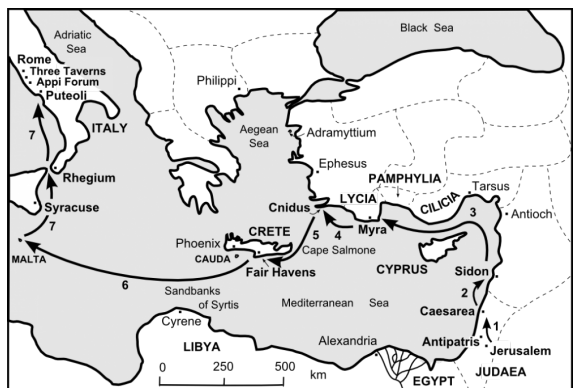
After spending some time there he departed and went from place to place through the region of Galatia and Phrygia, strengthening all the disciples. Now there came to Ephesus a Jew named Apollos, a native of Alexandria. He was an eloquent man, well-versed in the scriptures. He had been instructed in the Way of the Lord; and he spoke with burning enthusiasm and taught accurately the things concerning Jesus, though he knew only the baptism of John (Acts 18:23-25)



Paul's journey to Rome

Acts 27-28

When it was decided that we were to sail for Italy, they transferred Paul and some other prisoners to a centurion of the Augustan Cohort, named Julius. Embarking on a ship of Adramyttium that was about to set sail to the ports along the coast of Asia, we put to sea, accompanied by Aristarchus, a Macedonian from Thessalonica. The next day we put in at Sidon; and Julius treated Paul kindly, and allowed him to go to his friends to be cared for. Putting out to sea from there, we sailed under the lee of Cyprus, because the winds were against us. After we had sailed across the sea that is off Cilicia and Pamphylia, we came to Myra in Lycia. (Acts 27:1-5)



History?

- Paul Ricoeur: three kinds of historiography.
- Documentary History.
- Explanatory History.
- Poetic History.
 - Marked by divine interventions.
 - For example: Acts 16:6-10.
- So, a narrative of origins (“histoire de commencement”).
- But also: geography, politics, Roman institutions, place names etc.
- Dionysius of Halicarnassus: 10 Rules for writing history (next slide).

Rules of Historiography

- A noble subject
 - Of use to the readers
 - Objectivity
 - Well-constructed
 - Adequate research
 - Selection of scenes and variety in narration
 - Chronological order
 - Liveliness in the story telling
 - Moderate use of topography
 - Creation of good speeches, bearing in mind characters and contexts
- So, not a novel, nor biography, nor history, nor apologetics in the strict sense.
 - Rather, narrative of origins, broadly historical and strongly apologetic, aimed at instructing the hearers / readers at the time of writing.

Date?

- Earliest manuscript to come down to us
 - Terminus a quo
 - 62 AD Paul’s arrest and arrival at Rome
 - Terminus ad quem
 - Earliest reference: 1 Clement? Justin? Irenaeus?
- Papyrus 75
 - Papyrus 45
 - Contents
 - Date
 - Provenance
- Definitely post 70 because he uses Mark; the destruction of Jerusalem is already a past event.
 - Many scholars: 85-90 AD.
 - Probably a good deal later, because:
 - The author uses Josephus, so later than 93 AD.
 - The author has access to the Pauline corpus.
- Early second century.
 - Cf. Reaction to Jewish revolts in the Diaspora (115-117).
 - Cf. Context of the Pastorals (“wolves”, heresy, rejection of the OT, uneasy with the empire, yet no direct persecution).

Author! Author!

- Tradition puts much weight on the “we” passages
- This would exclude others mentioned in the third person, such Timothy, Barnabas, Silas, John Mark, and so forth.
- ...and so do Mark, Aristarchus, Demas, and Luke, my fellow workers. (Philem 1:24)
- Luke, the beloved physician, and Demas greet you. (Col 4:14)
- Only Luke is with me. Get Mark and bring him with you, for he is useful in my ministry. (2 Tim 4:11)

- KATA LOUKAN
- But Mark was anonymous
- Tradition accepted this universally
- Patristic information is dubious
- The “we” passages
- But there are better explanations
- Medical language
- This hypothesis has been demolished
- The preface in Lk 1:1-4 points out that the author was not an eye-witness to the events he narrates.
- Differences with Paul.
- Law–NB Gal 3:19 and Acts 7:38, 53 (mediated by angels).
- Angels–in Paul negative (Rom 8:38; 1 Cor 6:3; 2Cor 12:7; Gal 1:8; 3:19); in Acts positive Lk 1:11-13, 30-38, 2:9; 9:26; 12:8; 15:10; 16:22; Acts 5:19; 8:26; 10:3; 27:3).
- Eschatology–Paul (short); Acts (extended).
- Christology–
- Paul (pre-existence); Acts (doesn't have pre-existence).
- Paul (Jesus' life is not kerygma); Acts (Jesus story is kerygma).
- Paul (Jesus' death is salvific); Luke (no soteriological value attributed).
- Ecclesiology–
- Paul (little formal structure); Acts (Spirit but also presbyters and structured leadership).
- Paul (an apostle!!!); Acts (Paul is not an apostle).
- Paul in Acts is subservient to the apostolic college in some contrast with Paul's own attitudes towards them.
- So who was the author?
- Well-educated.
- Well-travelled.
- Good Greek.
- At home in the upper middle class of the Hellenistic world.
- Admirer of Paul but does not share Paul's view of himself, has a very different theology and does not represent Paul's theology with accuracy.

Location

- No consensus on location or audience
- Antioch?
- Ancient tradition holds Luke came from Antioch
- Peter and Paul were very active there
- Somewhere in the Aegean area linked to Paul?
- The writer does admire Paul, but does not belong to a Pauline school
- Even the Deutero-Paulines have a different view of Paul
- The author of Luke-Acts brings together Peter and Paul

Rome?

- Ancient tradition (e.g. Jerome) located the writing of Acts in Rome
- This could have arisen from Acts itself which ends in Rome
- Supporting arguments
- The Roman church began with strong links to Jerusalem and Jewish Christianity
- Paul wrote to them and eventually visited them
- Jewish-Gentile relations was a major concern on Rome

Supporting indications.

- The size of the Jerusalem church would have been encouraging to the Roman one.
- Acts seems to presuppose the geography and weather of the western Mediterranean. E.g. the south wind brings heat, not the east wind of the Middle East (8:22-23, 33; 12:54-55); roofs are tiled not like the mud and straw of Palestinian houses (Lk 5:19); Luke always uses the term lake for the sea of Galilee (only to the locals was it a

“sea”).

Supporting indications.

- The narrative has constantly looked towards Rome and there it come to a close.
- Acts is influenced by Romans, esp. Rom 1:3-4 which portrays a Davidic Christology, rare in Paul but common in Acts.

Sources

- When writing the Gospel.
- Luke had Mark, Q and many “traditions” unique to him (L).
- When the Acts.
- The author had no documents like Mark or Q.
- The author did have the Pauline corpus.
- The author had no document quite like the Acts as a basis.
- Consequently, the author was much more free in Acts to structure the narrative in terms of his own priorities and goals.

Prayer

Lord, inspire me to read your Scriptures and to meditate upon them day and night. I beg you to give me real understanding of what I read, that I in turn may put its precepts into practice. Yet, I know that understanding and good intentions are worthless, unless rooted in your graceful love. So I ask that the words of Scripture may also be not just signs on a page, but channels of grace into my heart. Amen.

(Origen, 184-253 AD)

Conversation

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2. Pentecost Tableau (Acts 2:1-13)

- Reading Acts 2:1-13
- Shavuot / Pentecost
- Within Acts
- The Pentecost tableau
- Commentary
- Message
- Thoughts for today
- Prayer / Conversation



#20182233

Reading

Acts 2:1 Now when the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. **2** Suddenly a sound like a violent wind blowing came from heaven and filled the entire house where they were sitting. **3** And tongues spreading out like a fire appeared to them and came to rest on each one of them. **4** All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit, and they began to speak in other languages as the Spirit enabled them.

Acts 2:5 Now there were devout Jews from every nation under heaven residing in Jerusalem. **6** When this sound occurred, a crowd gathered and was in confusion, because each one heard them speaking in his own language. **7** Completely baffled, they said, "Aren't all these who are speaking Galileans? **8** And how is it that each one of us hears them in our own native language? **9** Parthians, Medes, Elamites, and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and the province of Asia, **10** Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya near Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, **11** both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabs—we hear them speaking in our own languages about the great deeds God has done!" **12** All were astounded and greatly confused, saying to one another, "What does this mean?" **13** But others jeered at the speakers, saying, "They are drunk on new wine!"

- Read the story
- Observations / comments / queries
- Lectionary: Pentecost Sunday ABC

Shavuot / Pentecost

- Shavuot or Pentecost is one of the three pilgrimage feast of Judaism. Legislation can be found in Ex 23:16; 34:12; Lev 23:15-21; Dt 16:9-12.
- In the Hebrew Bible: the Festival of Weeks.
- It was an important harvest feast as we see from Paul's eagerness to be in Jerusalem for it (Acts 20:16).
- By the time of Jesus' ministry, it had also come to mark the giving of the Law, the Torah, on Mount Sinai. The metaphors used—sound, wind and fire—all have a considerable OT background.
- The link was clear in Rabbinic Judaism:
- "Pentecost is the day on which the Torah was given." Babylonian Talmud b. Pesah 68b.
- The feast is also mentioned in the Mishnah, in the significant context of the last judgment:
- At four seasons of the year the world is judged: at Passover for grain; at Pentecost for fruit of the tree; at the New Year all who enter the world pass before Him like troops since it is said, He who fashions the hearts of them al& who considers all their works (Ps. 33:15); and on the Festival [of Tabernacles] they are judged in regard to water. (Rosh Hashanah 1:2)
- In the third month after the Israelites went out from the land of Egypt, on the very day, they came to the Desert of Sinai. (Exodus 19:1) That is, roughly 50 days later. Cf. fire, sound and speech.

- Luke promotes Gentile mission, but,
 - ▶ on the occasion of Jewish feast
 - ▶ in fulfilment of early promises
 - ▶ and so, the first fruits of the harvest are taken in
 - ▶ the wind will blow Paul as far as Rome itself

Within Acts

- This dramatic scene and commentary correspond in some measure to the opening tableau in Luke 4:16-30. Like that opening scene in the Gospel, the portrayal of the day of Pentecost is both synthetic and programmatic.
- It is synthetic in that it gathers into a foundational scene the many experiences of the Holy Spirit which marked the life of the early church.
- It is programmatic in that this is the scene which holds the energy behind the breath-taking expansion of the Way recounted in the Acts.
- Luke lays out the material in the symbolic language of forty days of appearances and the outpouring the Spirit fifty days after Passover.

Gen 11:1 The whole earth had a common language and a common vocabulary. **2** When the people moved eastward, they found a plain in Shinar and settled there. **3** Then they said to one another, "Come, let's make bricks and bake them thoroughly." (They had brick instead of stone and tar instead of mortar.) **4** Then they said, "Come, let's build ourselves a city and a tower with its top in the heavens so that we may make a name for ourselves. Otherwise we will be scattered across the face of the entire earth."

Gen 11:5 But the LORD came down to see the city and the tower that the people had started building. **6** And the LORD said, "If as one people all sharing a common language they have begun to do this, then nothing they plan to do will be beyond them. **7** Come, let's go down and confuse their language so they won't be able to understand each other."

Gen 11:8 So the LORD scattered them from there across the face of the entire earth, and they stopped building the city. **9** That is why its name was called Babel—because there the LORD confused the language of the entire world, and from there the LORD scattered them across the face of the entire earth.

- By reversing linguistic disunity, the experience is revealed as both an eschatological event of new creation and a utopian restoration of the unity of the human race.
- The gift of the Spirit is the present eschatological gift and this gift is for the entire human race.

Joel 2:28 Then afterward (**Luke: in the last days**) I will pour out my spirit on all flesh; your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, and your young men shall see visions. **29** Even on the male and female slaves, in those days, I will pour out my spirit. (**Luke: and they shall prophesy**). **30** I will show portents in the heavens and on the earth, blood and fire and columns of smoke. **31** The sun shall be turned to darkness, and the moon to blood, before the great and terrible day of the Lord comes (**Luke: before the coming of the Lord's great and glorious day**). **32** Then everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved; (**Luke omits the remaining phrases:**) for in Mount Zion and in Jerusalem there shall be those who escape, as the LORD has said, and among the survivors shall be those whom the Lord calls.

- The text of Joel directs our understanding of the Pentecost event and links it to the rest of the Acts.
- The circumcised believers who had accompanied Peter were greatly astonished that the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out even on the Gentiles, for they heard them speaking in tongues and praising God. (Acts 10:45-46)
- When they heard this, they were baptised in the name of the Lord Jesus, and when Paul placed his hands on them, the Holy Spirit came upon them, and they began to speak in tongues and to prophesy. (Acts 19:5-6)

- Cf. So if the whole church comes together and all speak in tongues, and unbelievers or uninformed people enter, will they not say that you have lost your minds? (= 1 Corinthians 14:23; cf. 1 Corinthians 12-14 in general)

Pentecost Tableau

- This is a symbolic tableau, capturing multiple experiences of the Spirit, in dialogue with Genesis 11:1-9 and Joel.
- It combines the two themes of the Jewish feast of Shavuot / Pentecost.
- (i) Harvest: Pentecost initiates the gathering in of the Gentiles. Harvest language always suggests sifting, i.e. judgment.
- (ii) The giving of the Law on Sinai: Pentecost celebrated the writing of the Law on the hearts of believers (cf. Jeremiah).

vv.1-4: a single unity

- A. v.2 Sound like
- B. v. 2 Sound filled
- A* v.3 Tongues like
- B* v. 3 Tongues sat
- C* Summary: all filled

vv. 5-13: the tableau

- A. v. 5 Introduction
- B. v.6 Summary
- C. vv. 7-12 development of the summary
- D. v. 13 A contrary explanation

Commentary

Acts 2:1 Now when the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place.

- The beginning of the Christian harvest which is the theme of Acts, taking us from Jerusalem to Rome.
- Cf. Now when the days drew near for him to be taken up, Jesus set out resolutely to go to Jerusalem. (Luke 9:51)
- The languages are perhaps not meant literally. It means more that the Gospel message "speaks" to every human heart, regardless of culture etc.

Acts 2:2 Suddenly a sound like a violent wind blowing came from heaven and filled the entire house where they were sitting.

- God as a wind is found elsewhere, both in the Old Testament and the New Testament. It is invisible, unpredictable, uncontrollable and powerful.
- Thus it suggests itself as an image for God. This is true, yet it is not the wind which fills the house, but the sound!
- We are to think of an overwhelming, deafening sound.

Acts 2:3 And tongues spreading out like a fire appeared to them and came to rest on each one of them.

- Distributed might be better than divided, because the author stresses unity throughout.
- Fire was equally mysterious to early humans - being apparently not a thing, yet capable of giving light and heat (positive), death and destruction (negative).
- Cf. John answered them all, "I baptise you with water, but one more powerful than I am is coming—I am not worthy to untie the strap of his sandals. He will baptise you with the Holy Spirit and fire. (Luke 3:16)
- For John baptised with water, but you will be baptised with the Holy Spirit not many days from now." (Acts 1:5)

Acts 2:4 All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit, and they began to speak in other languages as the Spirit enabled them.

- "Filled with the Holy Spirit" is a prophetic idiom.

- Speaking in tongues was apparently a frequent phenomenon in the early church (1 Cor 14:1-33)
- "Filled" is a fulfilment of a prediction and command of Jesus (Luke 24:49; Acts 1:4-5, 8)
- See above under Joel. with the Holy Spirit not many days from now." (Acts 1:5)

Acts 2:5 Now there were devout Jews from every nation under heaven residing in Jerusalem.

- Suddenly, we seem to be outdoors.
- This suggests that we are to think not of all nations, but of Jews in these lands or among these nations.
- Again, he is not thinking of transient residents, but rather permanent foreign residents. The city did have a mixed population.

Acts 2:6 When this sound occurred, a crowd gathered and was in confusion, because each one heard them speaking in his own language.

- This represents the reversal of the Tower of Babel story in Genesis.
- The story itself is confused, which fits the desired narrative effect! Why should hearing people in your native language be a problem?

Acts 2:7 Completely baffled, they said, "Aren't all these who are speaking Galileans? **8** And how is it that each one of us hears them in our own native language?"

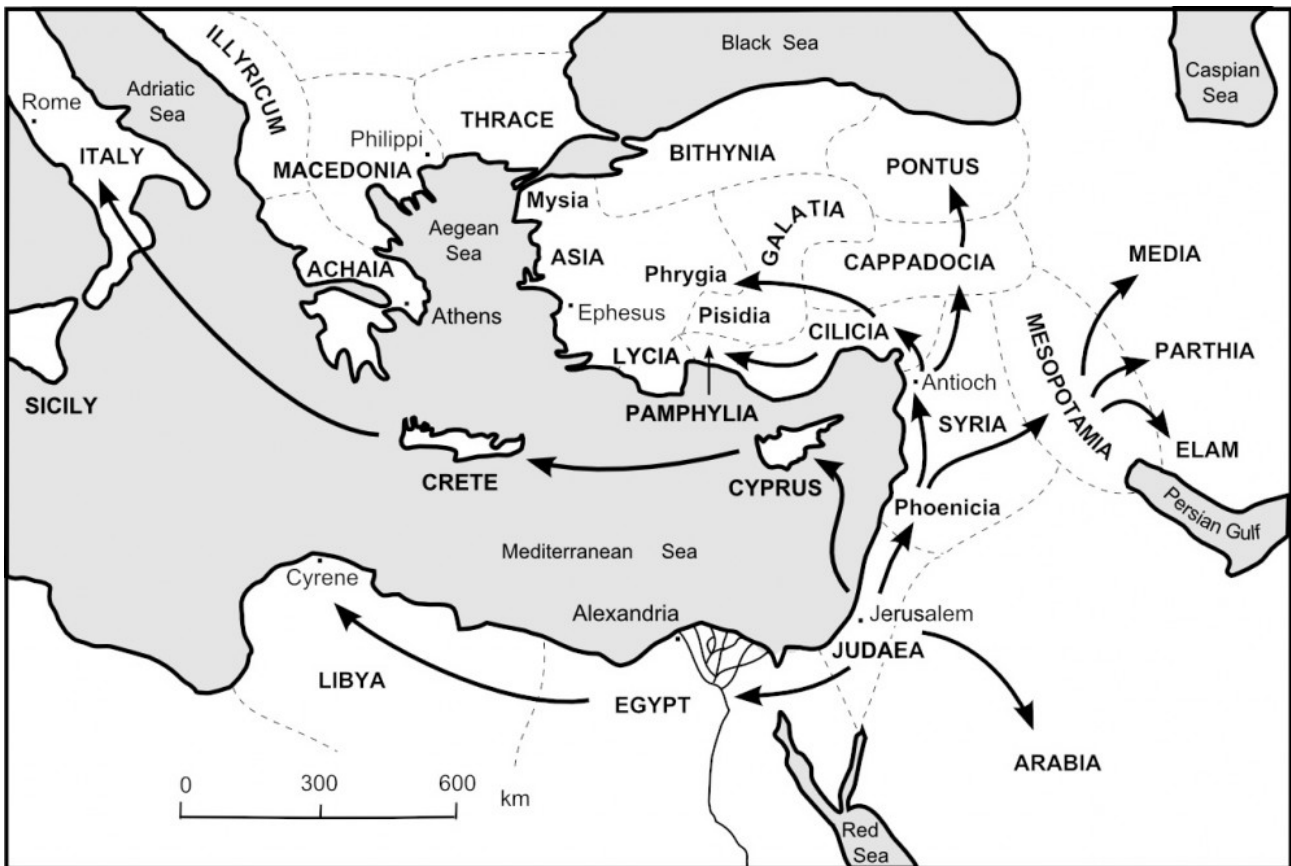
- Luke uses the crowd to express appropriate reaction.
- Foreign languages with Galilean accents? Galileans were known for their poor linguistic skills.
- *And a voice sounded forth from out of the midst of the fire which had flowed from heaven, a most marvellous and awful voice, the flame being endowed with articulate speech in a language familiar to the hearers, which expressed its words with such clearness and distinctness that the people seemed rather to be seeing than hearing it.*
Philo *On the Decalogue* 11.46
- In reality, the story symbolises the universality of the message and the capacity of the Gospel to address all sorts and conditions of people in their own terms.

Acts 2:9 Parthians, Medes, Elamites, and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and the province of Asia, **10** Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya near Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, **11** both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabs—we hear them speaking in our own languages about the great deeds God has done!"

- This is the account of Noah's sons Shem, Ham, and Japheth. Sons were born to them after the flood. ... These are the families of the sons of Noah, according to their genealogies, by their nations, and from these the nations spread over the earth after the flood. (Genesis 10:1, 32) Updated, so to speak, in Acts 2
- Directions from Jerusalem:
 - east: Parthians, Medes, Elamites, residents of Mesopotamia
 - centre: Judea
 - north: Cappadocia, Pontus, Asia, Phrygia, Pamphylia
 - southwest: Egypt, Libya
 - west: Rome, Crete

Acts 2:12 All were astounded and greatly confused, saying to one another, "What does this mean?" **13** But others jeered at the speakers, saying, "They are drunk on new wine!"

- Most likely: Lucan composition.



- Cf. the reaction to Paul in Athens: Also some of the Epicurean and Stoic philosophers were conversing with him, and some were asking, "What does this foolish babbler want to say?" Others said, "He seems to be a proclaimer of foreign gods." (They said this because he was proclaiming the good news about Jesus and the resurrection.) So they took Paul and brought him to the Areopagus, saying, "May we know what this new teaching is that you are proclaiming? For you are bringing some surprising things to our ears, so we want to know what they mean." (Acts 17:18-20)
- Thus Luke offers different evaluations reflecting the ambiguity of miracles as such.

Message

- Justification of the Gentile mission.
- While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit fell on all those who heard the message. The circumcised believers who had accompanied Peter were greatly astonished that the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out even on the Gentiles, for they heard them speaking in tongues and praising God. Then Peter said, "No one can withhold the water for these people to be baptised, who have received the Holy Spirit just as we did, can he?" (Acts 10:44-47)
- In the tradition, this account is viewed as the birth of the church, the new people of God.
- Who is gathered?
- What is their role?
- How were they empowered for this mission?
-
- The making of the new covenant: Lk 22:20.
- The gift of the Spirit on Pentecost is a mark of God's continuity and faithfulness to promises.
- This synthetic scene anticipates other outpourings of the Spirit: 8:17; 10:44-11:18; 19:1-6.
- Together in one place: not a private gift, but the one spirit given to all.
- Importance of the (relatively) neglected Holy Spirit.

Prayer

Breathe in me O Holy Spirit
that my thoughts may all be holy;
Act in me O Holy Spirit
that my works, too, may be holy;
Draw my heart O Holy Spirit
that I love but what is holy;
Strengthen me O Holy Spirit
to defend what is holy;
Guard me then O Holy Spirit
that I always may be holy.

St. Augustine of Hippo (AD 354-430)

Conversation

MISSION IMPOSSIBLE?
The Word of God and Evangelisation Today

Holy Cross College 2019
 Kieran J. O'Mahony
www.tarsus.ie



3. The Speeches as the key

- Key stories
- Risk of chaos?
- Speeches as the key
- God's plan
- Some insights for today
- Prayer / Conversation

Key stories

- There are peculiar story patterns across the Acts of the Apostles
- Stories paralleling the Gospel of Luke
- Stories told three times
- Stories of more than one Pentecost
- "Big" scenes...

Acts 1-12

- Long narratives
- Very short self-contained stories
- Sustained narratives of persecution
- Repeated "vignettes" of community life
- Examples of the substantial narratives in Acts 2-12 are Pentecost itself (2:1-42), the martyrdom of Stephen (6:8-8:1), the "conversion" of Saul (9:1-29), the conversion of Cornelius and his household (10:1-11:18).
- Around these large stories, we find shorter scenes, which move the story on: the healing at the Beautiful Gate (3:1-10), the complaint of the Hellenists against the Hebrews (6:1-6) leading to the appointment of the seven to serve at table, preparing us for the martyrdom of Stephen; Simon Magus (8:9-24); the account of Philip and the Ethiopian Eunuch (8:26-40); the lovely story of Tabitha (9:36-42).
- Within that, there are sustained narratives of persecution, echoing in some sense the passion narrative of Jesus himself (3:5-22; 5:17-42; 8:2-3; 12:1-23).
- Along with that story of persecution is affirmation of the continued well-being of the community and the spread of the Word (2:43-47; 4:32-37; 5:1-11 [a contrasting tale]; 6:7; 9:31; 12:24-25).

Acts 13-28

- Again substantial narratives
- Short stories or anecdotes
- Sustained narratives of persecution (this time from "the Jews")
- Repeated vignettes of community life and conversions.
- Then we have the first of the missionary journeys (Acts 13-14; Antioch in Syria, Seleucia, Cyprus, Paphos, Perga, Pisidian Antioch, Iconium, Lystra, Pisidia, Pamphylia, Attalia, Antioch in Syria).
- Within that grand story, there are minor tales such as the highly ironic blinding of Elymas, the healing of man crippled from birth with the attempt to worship the disciples.

Grand narratives

- For instance, the first missionary journey (Acts 13-14; Antioch in Syria, Seleucia, Cyprus, Paphos, Perga, Pisidian Antioch, Iconium, Lystra, Pisidia, Pamphylia, Attalia, Antioch in Syria).

- The “council” of Jerusalem is a major turning point in the narrative because it lays down the minimal conditions for communion between Christ-believing Jews and Gentiles (15:1-35).
- The second missionary journey forms for the next great arc of story-telling (Acts 15:36-18:22) mainly Syria and Cilicia, taking in Derbe, Lystra, Phrygia, Galatia, Troas, Samothrace, Neapolis, Philippi, Thessalonica, Amphipolis, Appolonia, Thessalonica, Berea, Athens, Corinth, Chenchrae, Ephesus, Caesarea, Jerusalem, Anthioch in Syria). The third missionary journey also forms a large arc (Acts 18:23-21:22; Galatia, Phrygia, Ephesus, Assos, Chios, Mitylene, Miletus, Cos, Palatra, Tyre, Jerusalem).

Short stories

- A good example is that of Bar-Jesus/ Elymas (13:4-12) – a highly ironic tale, of course. Other vignettes include Lydia (16:14-15); the slave girl (16:15-18).
- The story of Paul on the Areopagus is one of the great set-scenes of the Acts, where the gospel preaching takes on the philosophers of Athens on their home territory (17:16-33).

Opposition

- Pisidian Antioch (13:44, 48-50); Iconium (14:2-7). Opposition is registered among those insisting upon the full observance of the Law (15:1-5). Considerable opposition is experienced at the hand of slave owners and, for the first time, the disciples are put in prison, leading to a miraculous escape (Acts 16:19-40).
- In Thessalonica, the Jews are not happy with Paul’s preaching (17:1-13) and Paul is removed a few times for safety, ending up in Athens.
- In Corinth, there is further opposition (18:12-17) but no jailing.
- We cannot omit the “passion narrative of Paul” (Acts 21:17-28:31) which brings the Acts to such a theatrical, open-ended conclusion.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28
Peter												Paul															

- Echoing the Gospel of Luke
- Stories told three times
- Stories of more than one Pentecost

Risk of chaos?

- Immense cast of characters
- Vast variety of stories
- A good deal of “intercalation”
- Substantial repetitions
- Links with similar stories in Luke
- So what holds it all together?

Speeches as the key

- 50% of Acts is made up of sermons, discourses and letters
- Letters
- Jerusalem Council to Gentiles (15:23-29); Claudius Lysias to Felix (23:27-30)
- Speeches
- 33% is made up of Christian sermons
- Peter: 8 speeches (next slide)
- Paul: 9 speeches (next slide)
- Stephen: (7:2-53)
- Cornelius (10:30-33)
- James: 2 (15:13-21, 21:20-25)
- Gamaliel the Pharisee (5:35-39)
- Demetrius the silver-smith (19:25-27)
- Tertullus the lawyer (24:2-8)
- Festus the governor (23:27-30)

Peter's eight speeches

- Acts 1:16-22; 2:14-36, 38-39; 3:12-26; 4:8-12, 19-20; 5:29-32; 10:34-43; 11:5-17; 15:7-11

Paul's nine speeches

- Acts 13:16-41; 14:15-17; 17:22-31; 20:18-35; 22:1-21; 24:10-21; 26:2-23, 25-27; 27:21-26; 28:17-20
- Peter's first speech has a special, foundational importance.

- Speeches give the meaning of the story
- History of salvation
- Fulfilment of prophecy (Old Testament)
- Ministry of Jesus
- Proclamation of the Resurrection
- Preaching: Forgiveness and conversion
- Mission of the church

- The basis of mission: the death and resurrection of Jesus.
- The fulfilment of the Scriptures: the disciples are reminded that the life and death of Jesus must be seen in the light of the Scriptures.
- The content of the mission: this is summarised as repentance and forgiveness.
- The purpose of the mission: it is to being "from Jerusalem" but is intended for "all nations".
- The disciples are called to be witnesses.
- Mission will be accomplished in the power of the Holy Spirit.

God's plan

- ...this man, who was handed over by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God, you executed by nailing him to a cross at the hands of Gentiles. (Acts 2:23)
- For David, after he had served God's purpose in his own generation, died, was buried with his ancestors, and experienced decay, (Acts 13:36)
- For I did not hold back from announcing to you the whole purpose of God. (Acts 20:27)

Engagement with cultures

1. Antioch in Pisidia (13:13-43)

The speech in Antioch offers another grand vision of salvation history, working this time with the figure of David and the Psalms.

The preaching is successful on the first Sabbath but the presence of Gentiles caused upset on the second Sabbath. Nevertheless, Paul speaks appropriately to a mainly Jewish audience, using arguments and tropes acceptable to them.

2. Lystra (14:8-20)

This time, the audience is made up of pagans. Paul must first correct a serious misinterpretation: the Lystrans take Paul and Barnabas to be Hermes and Zeus. For this pagan audiences, Paul argues from nature and creation, using examples from farming and the weather. Naturally, it would not have made sense to have argued with them from Scripture, at least to begin with.

3. Athens (17:22-31)

The audience has changed to sophisticated urban pagans. Luke sets up a grand "debate", a gladiatorial contest between philosophy and the Good News. Epicureans and Stoics are named, as is the Areopagus, the place of their disquisitions.

The argument cannot be from Scripture or from agriculture. Paul makes use of his inspection of the city and his discovery of an altar to an unknown god. Thus using philosophy and poetry, he adapts himself to those before him.

Some insights for today

- Luke is calling his generation to trust the Holy Spirit. The protagonists in his story have all to adjust to the agenda of the Spirit.

- The plan is not theirs. On the contrary, the role of the disciple is to listen, in each generation, to what the Spirit is saying to the Churches (Rev 2:7).
- This hearing/obeying is the highest, perhaps costliest, form of conversion of heart.
- In the conversion of Cornelius it is really Peter who undergoes the significant change of heart.
- Both Peter and Paul are effective agents of proclamation because they live the conversions required.

Prayer

Be with us, loving God, as we bring your Good News to the people and world of today. Help to know what to keep and what let go of. Kindle in our hearts the fire of the Spirit; guide our words and, even more, shape our lives so that we become what we proclaim. Amen.

Conversation

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4. The Conversion of Cornelius

- Reading Acts 10:1-11:18
- Setting in the Acts (incl. Caesarea)
- An interesting omission
- Dramatic Analysis
- Message
- Theological themes
- Thoughts for today
- Prayer / Conversation



Reading

- Read the story.
- Observations / comments / queries.
- A very important and substantial story in Acts.
- Lectionary: Baptism (ABC); Easter Sunday (ABC) and the Easter 6B (all excerpts, long and short).
- Lectionary: 11:1-18 Easter 4 Monday.

Setting in Acts

- Acts 9:32-11:18: a unit of teaching.
- 3 Stories about Peter: (1) 9:32-35; (2) 9:36-43; (3) 10:1-11:18 = (a) 10:1-19 *the events* and (b) 11:1-18 *the justification of the events*.
- All three stories take place in Judea (incl. the administrative capital, Caesarea on the coast).
- The 3 stories follow on 3 stories about the Hellenists in 6:8-8:40.
- Caesarea: largely Gentile population.
- Centre of Roman administration and the army.
- Site of some of Herod's greatest building programmes.
- **Cohors II Italica Civium Romanorum.**
- No evidence that the Italian Cohort was in Caesarea before the 69 (i.e. after Peter and long before the writing of Acts).
- No evidence that it was anywhere else either!

Acts	Jesus	OT	Paul
9:32-35 Aeneas	Lk 5:18-26 Paralysed Man		14:8-12
9:36-43 Tabitha	Lk 8:40-56 Jairus' daughter	1Kgs 17/ 2 Kgs 4 Zarephath /Shunem	20:7-12 Eutychus
10 Centurion	Lk 7:2-10 Centurion	2Kgs 5 Naaman	Chs. 13-28 The Gentile Mission

- **Meanwhile he stayed in Joppa for some time with a certain Simon, a tanner.** (Acts 9:43)
- Lev 11:39-43 – a tanner is *perpetually* unclean
- Rabbinic tradition:
 - A father ought not to teach his son to be a tanner;
 - It was easier for a tanner's wife to get a divorce;
 - A synagogue could not be sold for use as a tannery.
 - A tannery could not be within 50 cubits from a town

- So: this throwaway remark indicates that Peter *already* thinks that the purity laws do not apply to Jews or to those who associate with them.

An interesting omission

Now the Pharisees and some of the experts in the law who came from Jerusalem gathered around him. And they saw that some of Jesus' disciples ate their bread with unclean hands, that is, unwashed. (For the Pharisees and all the Jews do not eat unless they perform a ritual washing, holding fast to the tradition of the elders. And when they come from the marketplace, they do not eat unless they wash. They hold fast to many other traditions: the washing of cups, pots, kettles, and dining couches.)

The Pharisees and the experts in the law asked him, "Why do your disciples not live according to the tradition of the elders, but eat with unwashed hands?" He said to them, "Isaiah prophesied correctly about you hypocrites, as it is written: 'This people honours me with their lips, but their heart is far from me. They worship me in vain, teaching as doctrine the commandments of men.' Having no regard for the command of God, you hold fast to human tradition." He also said to them, "You neatly reject the commandment of God in order to set up your tradition. For Moses said, 'Honour your father and your mother,' and, 'Whoever insults his father or mother must be put to death.'

But you say that if anyone tells his father or mother, 'Whatever help you would have received from me is corban' (that is, a gift for God), then you no longer permit him to do anything for his father or mother. Thus you nullify the word of God by your tradition that you have handed down. And you do many things like this."

Then he called the crowd again and said to them, "Listen to me, everyone, and understand. There is nothing outside of a person that can defile him by going into him. Rather, it is what comes out of a person that defiles him."

Now when Jesus had left the crowd and entered the house, his disciples asked him about the parable. He said to them, "Are you so foolish? Don't you understand that whatever goes into a person from outside cannot defile him? For it does not enter his heart but his stomach, and then goes out into the sewer." (This means all foods are clean.)

He said, "What comes out of a person defiles him. For from within, out of the human heart, come evil ideas, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, greed, evil, deceit, debauchery, envy, slander, pride, and folly. All these evils come from within and defile a person."

(Mark 7:1-23)

But elsewhere we read:

- But give from your heart to those in need, and then everything will be clean for you. (Luke 11:41).
- NB the supreme significance of the purity laws, touch God's will and the identity of Israel.

Dramatic analysis

(9.43): Peter a guest at home of Simon

Scene 1 (10:1-8): Cornelius (revelation)

Scene 2 (10:9-16): Peter (revelation)

Scene 3 (10:17-23a): Peter meets the envoys of Cornelius

Interlude (10:23b-27) *Journey of Peter and entourage; meeting of Peter and Cornelius*

Scene 4 (10:28-48) Peter and Cornelius in the latter's home in Caesarea

a. (28-33) Peter and Cornelius converse

b. (34-43) Peter's address to Cornelius and his household

c. (44-46a) The Spirit falls upon the listeners (revelation)

d. (46b-48a) Peter directs that they be baptised

(48b): Peter a guest at the home of Cornelius

Scene 5 (11:1-18) Peter explains his actions to the community at Jerusalem.

- Events are narrated (10:1-49).
- Events are recounted (11:1-18).
- Later recalled: (15:7-11, 14).
- Cornelius's is told three times.
- Cf. the three-fold repetition of Paul's conversion.
- Why such emphasis?
- Purity laws prohibited contact with Gentiles
- Gentiles will be included—but only at the time of the End
- Finally, Luke's *interesting omission* of Mark 7:1-23, with its key affirmation: Thus he declared all foods clean (Mark 7:19)
- Notice the series of parallel events:
 - 2 visions
 - 2 journeys
 - 2 speeches
 - 2 confirmations of the result
 - Such care indicates Lucan composition

Scene 1 (10:1-8)

- Genre: "Angelophany" with command (cf. Gen 19:12; Josh 5:13-15; 1 Chr 21:15-30 etc.
- Angelophanies in Lk-Acts: Lk 1:5-23, 26-38, 2:8-20; 24:1-11; Acts 1:6-11.
- *Introduction* (1-2)
- *Angel* (3)
- *Fear* (4a)
- *Command* (4b-6)
- *Obedience* (7)
- One of the God-fearers (cf. Aphrosidias inscription)
- One day Peter and John were going up to the temple at the hour of prayer, at **three o'clock** in the afternoon. (Acts 3:1)
- Joppa = Jaffa

Scene 2 (10:9-16)

- A double vision (Cornelius and Peter); widespread in antiquity; cf. Paul and Ananias.
- Prayer: Lk 3:21-22; 6:12-16; 9:28-31; 22:39-46; Acts 1:14; 13:1-3. Noon is the time of visions elsewhere: 26:13 and perhaps 8:26.
- The contraption appears 3 times (of course!).
- Test: Lk 4:3-11; Ezek 4:14.
- Clean / unclean: Rom 14:14; Mk 7:15; 1 Tim 4:1-4.

Scene 3 (10:17-23a)

- Simultaneous narrative (easy in cinema; tricky in narrative).
- Peter is pondering.
- The message is given four times: to Peter in a vision (1), in an audition (2), by the Spirit (3) and in the report about Cornelius (4).
- Rem: house of Simon the tanner; rem. these are Gentiles, with whom it is not customary to eat.
- Zenizō: to show hospitality, receive as a guest, entertain.

Interlude (10:23b-27)

- This scene brings the main protagonists together.
- Worship: Peter rejects this as much as Paul does in 14:11-15.
- I.e. the purity laws are suspended but the prohibition against idolatry is not (Ex 20:3).
- In any case, the Gospel witnesses do not draw attention to themselves.
- Cf. *For we do not proclaim ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, and ourselves as your slaves for Jesus' sake.* (2 Cor 4:5)

Scene 4a (10:28-33)

- It is a stretch for Peter to be in the house of a Gentile.

- No specific law: but see Dan 1:8-16; Tob 1:10-13, Jdt 10:5; 12:1-20. In effect, the “fence around the law.”
- Letter of Aristeas 139 and 142 calls these extra regulations “impregnable ramparts and walls of iron” to protect Israel from mingling with the other nations.
- Peter acts in accordance with Jesus’ practice in Luke: 5:12-15, 5:29-32; 7:36-50; 10:29-37; 11:37-41; 15:1-2 and 19:1-10.
- Later Christian teaching draws out the implications of Jesus’ practice—probably never verbalised as in Mark 7, as otherwise people would have appealed to that in the early disputes.
- The centurion recounts his vision and reaction.
- His prayer seems to have been a petition. Perhaps we are meant to understand that he follows some of the Eighteen Benedictions (for a redeemer, for forgiveness and for redemption). Jesus is all of these.
- His obedience is very evident.
- His request betokens a remarkable openness to the kerygma.

Scene 4b (10:34-43)

A. vv. 34b-35 Universalism

B. vv. 26-38: Jesus—what he did

C. vv. 39a: Witnesses

B* vv. 39b-40: Jesus—what has done to him

C* vv. 41-42: Witnesses

A* v. 43 Universalism

- **Universalism:** cf. Testament of Job 4:8; Rom 2:11; Gal 2:6; Col 3:25; Eph 6:9; 1 Pet 1:17; James 2:1, 9; 1 Clement 1:3; Barnabas 4:12; Polycarp, To the Philipppians 6:1.
- vv.36-38 Jesus’ activity as prophet.
- v. 29 The witnesses to the ministry of Jesus.
- vv. 39b-40 Jesus is rejected (using the language of Galatians); the resurrection (i.e. vindication).
- vv. 41-42 The witnesses to the resurrection of Jesus. Cf. Lk 24:36-42; Acts 1:4.
- v. 43 **Universalism:** as already implied in the Pentecost speech.
- Cf. Peter said to them, “Repent, and each one of you be baptised in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is for you and your children, and for all who are far away, as many as the Lord our God will call to himself.” (Acts 2:38-39)
- Cf. Lk 2:29-32; 3:6; 4:25-27; 24:47; Acts 1:8.

Scene 4c (10:44-46a)

- Literary technique of “interrupting a speech”, widely used in antiquity and also in the Acts (Acts 11:15; 17:32; 22:22; 23:7; 26:24).
- The interruption indicates that the divine is making an intervention.
- The intervention confirms once more that the inclusion of the Gentiles is also God’s desire.
- Circumcised believers (= Jews) are astonished. As to why there were astonished, see the next slide.
- The accompanying gifts, while echoing Pentecost, can be varied across the Acts: tongues (2:4; 10:46; 19:6), healing (9:17-18), powerful preaching (4:31); prophecy (19:6).

Compare the Masoretic Text (MT) with the Targum Pseudo-Jonathan

For how shall it be known that I have found favour in your sight, I and your people, unless you go with us? In this way, we shall be distinct, I and your people, from every people on the face of the earth.” (Ex 33:16 MT)

But by what shall it be known now that I have found mercy before you except that your Shekhinah speaks with us, and miracles are done for us *when you remove the spirit of prophecy from upon the nations, and converse by the Holy Spirit to me and to your people, so that we become different from all the nations that are on the face of the earth?*” (Ex 33:16 Tg Ps-Jn)

Scene 4d (10:46b-48a)

- Peter's question expects the answer "no one."
- Notice the Holy Spirit is given *before* baptism.
- Baptism in the name of the Lord Jesus: cf. 1Cor 1:13; 6:11.
- By divine initiative and apostolic response, the Gentiles are included in the people of God.

Scene 4 (10:48b)

- The invitation tests the validity of the events and the baptism.
- "They" = Cornelius and his household
- Thus, the whole scene is framed by staying with an unclean Jew, Simon the tanner, and an unclean Gentile, Cornelius the centurion.

Scene 5 (11:1-18)

- Back to the Jerusalem community, the story unfolds in three moments.
- vv.1-3 The Jewish Christians have a serious **objection**.
- v. 4 Step by step or in an orderly way (cf. Lk 1:3)
- vv. 5-17 Peter **defends** his actions - and the whole story is told all over again.
- God's initiative x4: Peter's vision and audition, plus the Holy Spirit; Cornelius' vision and audition, plus the Holy Spirit.
- V. 16 is a significant expansion: i.e. a prophecy of *the Lord himself* is being fulfilled. Also, Peter travelled with witnesses.
- I.e. a six-fold proof is being offered.
- v. 18 The **resolution** of the issue is reported most peacefully

Message

- **Context:** 10:1-2, 22, 30-32, 10:9b-10a.
- **Catalysts:** 10:3-6, 10:b-16 (double vision and audition) 10:34-43 (preaching).
- **Counter-forces:** 10:14, 17, 28, 11:3.
- **Conversion:** 10:44-48a
- **Evidence** of genuineness: 10:48b; 11:18.
- In this way, it resembles the other great conversion story in 9:1-30.

Theological themes

- **The Holy Spirit in the life of the church**
- **The church in a non-Christian culture**
- **How to become a Christian**
- The church as the continuation of the plan and purpose of God
- The relations of Christians to the secular world
- The unity of the one church

Thoughts for today

- The Spirit is active in people's lives **before** their formal aggregation to the community of faith.
- **Outsiders** are part of God's plan: Cornelius is not only a Gentile but a commander of the despised Roman army.
- **Sacred and profane** no longer count as distinctions.
- Spiritual **experience** matters!
- Even highly important church leaders **need to and are able to learn!**
- Are there ways in which we / I **hinder** God?

Prayer

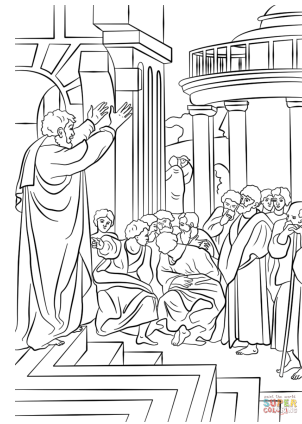
God of new birth and new life, help me to embrace all you have done for us in Jesus' death and resurrection. Help me to live my faith according to his example and bear witness in our time to your transforming grace. Through the same Christ our Lord. Amen.

Conversation

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5. Paul in Athens

- Reading Acts 17:16-34
- The Areopagus
- Within Acts
- Speech
- Commentary
- Message
- Theological themes
- Thoughts for today
- Prayer / Conversation



Reading

- Read the story.
- Observations / comments / queries.
- Lectionary: never on a Sunday.
- Lectionary: Easter 6 Thursday every year.

The Areopagus

- Athens: symbol of the high point of Greek culture.
- A rocky hill ca. 115 m. (377 ft.) high, near the Acropolis and Agora in Athens, whose name was derived from the Greek god of war Ares (also called Mars Hill after the Roman Mars).
- Areopagus also refers to the council that once met on the above-named hill. (This council retained the name even after moving its meeting to the Royal Stoa.)
- The Areopagus' authority vacillated throughout time, but during the Roman era it was responsible for various educational and philosophical/religious concerns as well as legal matters such as forgery and standards of measurement.

Paul was in Athens:

1Th. 3:1 Therefore when we could bear it no longer, we decided to be left alone in Athens.

As in other such set-pieces, we discover not what happened but Luke's idealized version of what ought to have happened, so marvellously wrought that for its readers it provided the emblem of what possibly could happen.

LT Johnson, Acts of the Apostles, p.318

Why is the story here?

- Second Half of Acts: the Mission of Paul to the ends of the earth (Acts 15:36-28:31).
- Philippi, Thessalonica, **ATHENS**, Corinth.
- Symbolic centre of Greek culture (Epicureans, Stoics, the Areopagus, good Greek, knowledge of pagan religious, philosophy and poetry).
- Dramatically: commerce, philosophy and religion.
- Three reactions: mockery, postponement, belief.

Structure

- 17:16-21 Context of the sermon (in detail).
- 17:22-31 Sermon itself.
- 17:32-34 Responses to the proclamation.

Basic structure

- (a) Topics
- (b) Proof(s)

Developed structure

- Introduction (Exordium)
- Topic (Propositio)
- Proof(s) Probatio(nes)
- Conclusion (Peroratio)

Each “moment” has its own function and purpose.

Introduction

Acts 17:16 While Paul was waiting for them in Athens, his spirit was **greatly upset** because he saw the city was **full** of idols. 17 So he was addressing the Jews and the God-fearing Gentiles in the synagogue, and in the **marketplace** every day those who happened to be there. 18 Also some of the **Epicurean** and **Stoic** philosophers were conversing with him, and some were asking, “What does this foolish babbler (**spermologos**; a bird brain) want to say?” Others said, “He seems to be a proclaimer of **foreign gods.**” (*They said this because he was proclaiming the good news about Jesus and the resurrection.*) 19 So they **took** Paul and brought him to the **Areopagus**, saying, “May we know what this **new** teaching is that you are proclaiming? 20 For you are bringing some surprising things to our ears, so we want to know what they mean.” 21 (*All the Athenians and the foreigners who lived there used to spend their time in nothing else than telling or listening to something new.*)

- Introducing “new gods” was a capital offence; possibly they heard **Jesus** and his consort **Anastasia** (John Chrysostom)!
- Cf. Socrates.
- The following speech is about the philosophy of knowledge and the verb “to know” bounces around the text: vv. 19, 20, 23 (twice) and 30.
- Notice the disparagement of the Athenians, as always attracted by whatever is “in”. It could also be construed as “openness” to “new things” (!)

Speech

22 Then Paul stood in front of the Areopagus and said,

Exordium (*captatio*, but ambiguous)

“Athenians, I see how extremely religious you are in every way.

23 For as I went through the city and looked carefully at the objects of your worship, I found among them an altar with the inscription,
 ‘To an **unknown** god.’ (literary evidence for this, chiefly)

Propositio (to intrigue and awaken interest)

What therefore you worship as **unknown**, this I proclaim to you.

- The altar on the left was located on the Palatine Hill, Rome, where once stood the palaces of the Caesars.
- It dates from about 100 B.C. and has the inscription, to a god, whether male or female!

Probatio 1

24 This God is the one who made the world and everything in it, he who is Lord of heaven and earth, (*topos*)

does not live in shrines made by human hands, (cf. Acts 7:48-50)

25 nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all mortals life and breath and all things. (This would be a common opinion among the educated.)

Probatio 2

26 From one ancestor he made all nations to inhabit the whole earth, and he allotted the times of their existence and the boundaries of the places where they would live, 27 so that they would search for God many texts, esp. psalms and perhaps grope for him and find him—though indeed he is not far from each one of us. 28 For 'In him we live and move and have our being'; as even some of your own poets have said, 'For we too are his offspring.'

- Aratas, *The Phaenomena*

Probatio 3

29 Since we are God's offspring, (the child resembles the parent, not vice versa) we ought not to think that the deity is like gold, or silver, or stone, an image formed by the art and imagination of mortals.

Peroratio

30 While God has overlooked the times of human ignorance, now he commands all people everywhere to repent, 31 because he has fixed a day on which he will have the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed, and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead."

Narrative conclusions

- Acts 17:32 When they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some scoffed; cf. Pentecost.
- But others said, "We will hear you again about this." 33 At that point Paul left them. 34 But some of them joined him and became believers, including Dionysius the Areopagite and a woman named Damaris, and others with them.
- Modest success.
- No evidence of a Christian community in Athens until the time of Dionysius of Corinth (c. 170).

A. Introduction: evidence of ignorance in pagan worship (22-23)

B. The object of true worship is the one Creator God (24-25)

C. Proper relationship between humanity and God (26-28)

B* The objects of false worship are the idols of gold, silver, or stone (29)

A* Conclusion: the time of ignorance is over

Commentary

v. 22

- Captatio benevolentiae.
- Religious or superstitious.
- In any case, speaking to their situation in which religion is accepted but, in Paul's view, misguided.

v. 23

- Picking up v. 16
- Pausanias mentions altars to unknown gods in Athens (always in the plural, according to Jerome)
- 23b is very plain and powerful
- Picking up v. 18: the "proclaimer of foreign gods" now proclaims!

vv. 24-25

- The God of the cosmos rather than just the earth. Cf. Acts 14:15-17.
- The *nature* of God is a topic across the speech: 24a, 25b, 26-28, based however on Biblical teaching.
- Stephen said something similar in 7:48, this time *against* the Temple in Jerusalem. In brief: Temples are no better than idols.

- This is quite philosophical language, resembling the writings of Seneca. Cf. 2 Macc 15:35 and 3 Macc 2:9.

vv. 26-27

- Starting point: the unity of the human race under God; old Greek problem of the one and the many.
- Implied is some reception of the Genesis account.
- Why populate the world? Cf. Gen 1:28.
- Times and limits could also be historical periods and political boundaries Cf. Dt 32:8 (LXX).
- Kind of *preparatio evangelica*.
- V. 27 is full of pathos and very moving: the frailty of human effort encounters the nearness of God.

v. 28

- This very explains the previous verse. The first part *might* come from a Greek source using a play on Zeus and zóe.
- Cf. These people worship God the overseer and creator of all, whom all men worship including ourselves, O King, except that we have a different name. Their name for him is Zeus and Jove. The primitive men, consistently with this, demonstrated that the one **by whom all live and are created** is the master and Lord of all. In your excelling all men by your nobility of soul, I beg you to release those held in slavery." (Aristeas 1:16).
- The quotation from the *Phaenomena* of Aratus was a popular one and well-known.

v. 29

- This is a syllogism with a piece missing (technically an enthymeme), as follows:
- We are God's offspring, *being in his image*
- *As a result we resemble him*
- and not the other way round!
- A standard Jewish polemic against graven images.

v. 30

- The true God is unknown, hence the times of ignorance and now the knowledge of God and salvation are offered to all.
- The appeal suddenly resembles appeals to Jewish audiences in the Acts.
- Repent: lit. *metanoiein* from *metanoia*.

v. 31

- With the call to repentance comes a threat.
- The human response to the offer matters.
- It is not the day of judgment which triggers a reaction but the resurrection from the dead.
- The deferral of the (actually implied) mention of Jesus is known as the "subtle approach" known as *insinuatio*.
- Very polished piece of rhetoric.
- **Inflection** (all the cases of the subject)
- **Assonance** (internal vowels), **alliteration** (initial sound), **reduplication** (same word), **antistrophe** (link words), **litotes** (affirmation in the negative), **paronomasia** (similar sounding words with dissimilar meanings)
- E.g. of the latter: **theōrō** (v.22) and **anatheōrōn** (v.23)

vv. 32-33

- Cf. the various reactions on Pentecost (2:12-13).
- Epicureans were very much against life after death; the Stoics less so.
- In any case, the hero had held his own before a very august audience.

v. 34

- The positive reaction is meagre enough.

- Critical scholarship proposes that Luke invented both personalities.
- Luke likes people of high station.

Companion text

Mission of the 70

(Lk only, a parallel of the turning to Gentiles in Acts)

Luke 10:1 After this the Lord appointed seventy others and sent them on ahead of him in pairs to every town and place where he himself intended to go. 2 He said to them, "The harvest is plentiful, but the labourers are few; therefore ask the Lord of the harvest to send out labourers into his harvest.

Luke 10:16 "Whoever listens to you listens to me, and whoever rejects you rejects me, and whoever rejects me rejects the one who sent me."

Luke 10:20 Nevertheless, do not rejoice at this, that the spirits submit to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven."

Message

- Very aware of the culture.
- Able to use classical rhetoric.
- Starts with people's (inchoate) experience and uses the Good News to name it.
- God's presence in all that is (panentheism cf. Wisdom books).
- Delays reference to Jesus until it is appropriate.

Theological themes

- The Holy Spirit in the life of the church
- **The church in a non-Christian culture**
- How to become a Christian
- The church as the continuation of the plan and purpose of God
- **The relations of Christians to the secular world**
- The unity of the one church

Thoughts for today

- Beginning where people find themselves.
- Identifying some contemporary illusions.
- The use of syllogism and close argument.
- The use of poetry for persuasion.
- Not being afraid of "the academy" and the media.

Prayer

God of all creation,
 Your spirit dances throughout the earth.
 You give drink to the trees,
 shade for the birds,
 bread for the hungry,
 you bring life and make all things holy.
 Flood us with your grace,
 so we may sow seeds of love, justice and beauty,
 and reflect your kingdom here on earth.
 We ask this through Christ your Son, Jesus Christ Amen.

Conversation

MISSION IMPOSSIBLE?
The Word of God and Evangelisation Today
 Holy Cross College 2019
 Kieran J. O'Mahony
www.tarsus.ie

6. Paul in Rome

- The story thus far
- House Arrest
- Open endings
- Use in the Lectionary
- Potential for reflection
- Prayer / Conversation

The story thus far

- The Jerusalem Church (1-12)
 - ▶ Beginnings (1-7)
 - ▶ Beyond Jerusalem (8-12)
- The Pauline Mission (13-28)
 - ▶ Paul to the Gentiles (13-19)
 - ▶ Paul's final journey (20-28)
- The sea voyage to Rome (27-28)
 - ▶ Journey to Malta (27)
 - ▶ Paul on Malta (28:1-10)
 - ▶ Journey to Rome (28:11-16)
 - ▶ Paul in Rome (28:17-29)
- Conclusion of Acts (28:30-31)



House Arrest

v. 16 has a double function to end the previous story and to frame the ending of Acts.

Scene 1: vv. 17-22.

Scene 2: vv. 23-29.

Conclusion: vv.30-31.

We will see each in turn, briefly.

Note that Paul's destiny echoes that of Jesus himself: both handed over, both innocent, both seen as innocent by the Romans and both (presumably) put to death.

Acts 28:17-18

- A meeting about a meeting (ahem!).
- A summary for the leaders and for us.
- Paul is a Jew (underlined above); cf. 21:23-26; 22:3; 23:6; 24:17-18; 26:5
- Commitment to his ancestral religion: 22:3; 24:14.
- Paul's innocence is emphasised and recognised even by the Romans themselves.

Act 28:19-20

- Paul's appeal is not an attack on his people because he was forced into it.
- Why is Paul in chains? Because of the "hope of Israel" = end time faith in the resurrection (23:6; 26:6-8), and in particular because of the messiah, Jesus, risen from the dead.
- Antithesis: chains and hope.
- Missing: Roman Christians (founded by?); any ref. to the Letter to the Romans; no baptisms etc.; nothing about the legal case.

Acts 28:21-22

- Note the ABA* structure.

- This professed ignorance is historically unlikely.
- Centre: they are willing to listen.
- Negative reports about the sect (cf. the neutral use of this word *haireisis* in Acts 5:17; 15:5; 24:5, 14; 26:5; 28:22).

Acts 28:23-24

- Then, the meeting: (a) speech; (b) reaction; (c) final speech. Cf. the speech in Pisidian Antioch (13:15-41, 42-49) with its double encounter. Hence, Acts 13-28 as a coherent unit.
- Tense: the imperfect – it went on all day.
- Pattern: Jews first, then Gentiles (13:42-48; 18:5-7; 19:8-10).
- Positive Jewish response: (2:12-13; 4:1-4; 5:12-17; 6:8-14; 9:21-25; 13:42-45; 17:1-5; 18:4, 12-17; 19:8-10).
- Jewish discord (*asymphōnoi*) in contrast to Christian unity: 1:14; 2:43-47; 4:32-35; 8:6; 15:25. NB: cultural value of unity v. discord.

Acts 28:25-27

- Notice the change in tone.
- Cited many times in the NT, but Luke alone gives the all-important introduction.
- Rhetorical figure of antithesis
- NB contrast between the MT and the LXX

Hebrew Bible (MT)

Isa 6:9 He said, "Go and tell these people:
 'Listen continually, but don't understand!
 Look continually, but don't perceive!'
 10 Make the hearts of these people calloused;
 make their ears deaf and their eyes blind!
 Otherwise they might see with their eyes
 and hear with their ears,
 their hearts might understand and they might repent
 and be healed."

Greek Old Testament (LXX)

Isa 6:9 He said, "Go and tell these people:
 'You shall indeed hear but not understand.
 You shall indeed look but never see.
 10 Gross is the heart of this people;
 They will not hear with their ears;
 they have closed their eyes;
 So that they may not see with their eyes
 and hear with the ears
 and understand with their heart and be converted,
 and I heal them.

- Imperatives become indicatives
- NB Irony of blindness on the lips of Paul!
- Offer of conversion
- Healing = salvation

A. Heart grown dull
 B. Ears hard of hearing.
 C. Shut eyes.
 C* Look with your eyes.
 B* Listen with your ears.
 A* Understand with the heart.

Matthew	Mark	Luke
With them indeed is fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah that says: 'You will indeed listen, but never understand, and you will indeed look, but never perceive. (Matthew 13:14)	In order that 'they may indeed look, but not perceive, and may indeed listen, but not understand; so that they may not turn again and be forgiven.' (Mark 4:12)	He said, "To you it has been given to know the secrets of the kingdom of God; but to others I speak in parables, so that 'looking they may not perceive, and listening they may not understand.'" (Luke 8:10)
Acts	Romans	John
Go to this people and say, You will indeed listen, but never understand, and you will indeed look, but never perceive. (Acts 28:26)	As it is written, "God gave them a sluggish spirit, eyes that would not see and ears that would not hear, down to this very day." (Romans 11:8)	He has blinded their eyes and hardened their heart, so that they might not look with their eyes, and understand with their heart and turn— and I would heal them. (John 12:40)

Acts 28:28

- So, once more Paul turns to the Gentiles.
- Divine plan and Fulfilment of prophecy.
- Jewish acceptance *and* Jewish rejection.
- Gentile entry followed Jewish rejection.
- Mediterranean: *both and* approach.
- Status reversal is a theme.
- NB Salvation: Luke 1:69, 71, 77; 19:9; Acts 4:12; 7:25; 13:26, 47; 16:17; 27:34.

Acts 28:30-31

- Back into third person narrative.
- Two years = period of special blessing in the Acts: 18:11; 19:10.
- Extensive links with Acts 1, as kind of frame / *inclusio*.
 - ▶ Kingdom of God: Acts 1:3, 6 and 28:23, 31.
 - ▶ Universal mission: Acts 1:8 and 28:28.
 - ▶ Teaching: 1:1 and 28:31.
 - ▶ Holy Spirit: Acts 1:2 and 28:25.
- Unhindered (the very last word) even though the unhindered Gospel is also an unfinished Gospel.

Cf. Chrysostom on this ending:

The author (Luke) conducts his narrative up to this point and leaves the hearer thirsty so that he fills up the lack by himself going through reflections. The outsiders (i.e. non-Christian writers) do also likewise. Consider indeed that what follows is absolutely identical with what comes before.

Homily 55 on the Acts

Cf. Richard Pervo on this ending:

Luke's own last word is a perfect summary of his writings, a one- word closure that is, at the same time, an opening, a bright and invigorating bid to the future, an assurance that 'the ends of the earth' is not the arrival at a boundary, but realization of the limitless promises of the dominion of God.

Pervo 1990, 96

Open Endings

Consistent with the story thus far

- Paul the Jew
- Paul, though innocent, arrested and handed over to the Romans

- Christians as a “sect” within Judaism.
- The Christian message fulfils the Scriptures.
- Proclaiming the kingdom of God and teaching about the Lord Jesus
- Divided response.
- First to the Jew, then to the Gentiles.
- At his own expense.
- The representative of a church that welcomes all.
- Without hindrance.
- Compare the endings of Mark, Matthew, Luke and John
- Suspended ending is known in antiquity.
- Paul’s actual destiny is implied earlier.
- Nevertheless, the unfinished and unhindered story is to be finished.

“Unfettered yet unfinished, the gospel can be completed only when the audience takes up the challenge at the beginning of the first of Luke’s two volumes proclaimed by John the Baptist, who also quotes the words of the prophet Isaiah:” all flesh shall see the salvation of God” (Luke 3:6) Mikeal C. Parsons in the *Paideia* commentary on Acts.

- Classical rhetoric: the peroratio had three “functions”
 - ▶ *Enumeratio* - synthesis.
 - ▶ *Amplificatio* - expansion.
 - ▶ *Commiseratio* - emotion.
- Acts 28:17-31 is a real synthesis.
- Paul expands with Isaiah 6:9-10.
- The unfinished ending touches the emotions and leaves the reading with a “where now” conundrum.
- The future is always open because it belongs to God

Theological themes

- The Holy Spirit in the life of the church
- The church in a non-Christian culture
- How to become a Christian
- The church as the continuation of the plan and purpose of God
- The relations of Christians to the secular world
- The unity of the one church

Use in the Lectionary

On Sundays, we do not read Acts beyond chapter 15 (!).
Weekdays: Saturday Easter 7 (years 1 and 2)
So, only once a year and never on a Sunday.

Potential for Reflection

- Discerning again the plan of God.
- History belongs to God and is therefore always open.
- Salvation.
- Paul still preaching.
- Unfettered yet unfinished.

Summary

- Final scene in Acts.
- Final scene in Luke-Acts.
- Carefully crafted to bring about a special effect.
- Notice what is missing (hint: the death of Paul).
- Open endings.
- Salvation.

Prayer

Loving God, our lives are in your hands and we find our most true selves in conformity with your vision. Saving God, you have reached out to us in the story Jesus of Nazareth, Son of your love, in whom we see our story too. Life-giving God, your Spirit encourages us to be faithful and true witnesses, not only with our words but even more with our deeds. Help us to live joyfully the vision of The Way, so that others may be inspired and so that the Kingdom though unfinished may flourish unhindered. Amen

Conversation

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