

**40 MINUTES A DAY
FOR
40 DAYS
FROM
THE
BOOK OF ACTS
(BEGINNING WITH THE ASCENSION)**

The Book of Acts is a particular writer's perspective (the author also penned the Gospel of Luke) addressing the emergence of the church following the death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus. It is historical but not as an exhaustive history of the early church. Rather, it is a faith narrative depicting from the writer's particular perspective the manner in which followers of Jesus now entrusted with the presence and power of the Holy Spirit were able to speak for the faith that called Jesus Lord and Messiah, addressing a historical and liturgical relationship with Judaism and imagining a gospel that reaches out into the Gentile world.

For forty minutes a day for forty days, you are invited to prayerfully read and reflect upon particular passages from the Book of Acts, and hopefully drawing connections with this part of Holy Scripture, will be able to discern the working of the Holy Spirit in your life and the life of the church in our day.

THURSDAY, MAY 13, 2021

ACTS 1:1-5

In the first book, Theophilus, I wrote about all that Jesus did and taught from the beginning until the day when he was taken up to heaven, after giving instructions through the Holy Spirit to the apostles whom he had chosen. After his suffering he presented himself alive to them by many convincing proofs, appearing to them during forty days and speaking about the kingdom of God. While staying with them, he ordered them not to leave Jerusalem, but to wait there for the promise of the Father. "This," he said, "is what you have heard from me; for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now."

A contemporary Lutheran biblical scholar quotes: "The church lives not after Christ, but under him, and the Book of Acts deals with what Jesus continues to do and teach through his church in the power of the Spirit." On this day, the church celebrates the Ascension of Jesus into heaven. But the message of and about Jesus continues in and through the divine presence and power of the Holy Spirit. Reflect upon the manner in which the Holy Spirit is at work in and through you.

How is your life reflective of and consistent with the activity of the Holy Spirit in our time and place? How is God's promise related to your baptismal life?

FRIDAY, MAY 14, 2021

ACTS 1:6-11

So, when they had come together, they asked him, "Lord, is this the time when you will restore the kingdom to Israel?" He replied, "It is not for you to know the times or periods that the Father has set by his own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." When he had said this, as they were watching, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight. While he was going and they were gazing up toward heaven, suddenly two men in white robes stood by them. They said, "Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking up toward heaven? This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven."

For many of us, we like to live with some measure of certainty, of absoluteness. We desire answers, definitions, completeness. We want to grasp onto some measure of what the future holds. How will it all turn out. But today's passage indicates that some things are only known to God. Our task is a journey in the earthly here-and-now and not idly gazing into heaven and the hereafter. It's about sharing the gospel to the whole world with a measure of comfort that Jesus will return.

Prayerfully reflect upon your place and activity in God's plan of salvation. What importance and diligence do you exert in carrying forth the word of Christ?

SATURDAY, MAY 15, 2021

ACTS 1:12-14

Then they returned to Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is near Jerusalem, a sabbath day's journey away. When they had entered the city, they went to the room upstairs where they were staying, Peter, and John, and James, and Andrew, Philip and Thomas, Bartholomew and Matthew, James, son of Alphaeus, and Simon the Zealot, and Judas, son of James. All these were constantly devoting themselves to prayer, together with certain women, including Mary the mother of Jesus, as well as his brothers.

According to Acts, the early ministry of the church was initially centered in Jerusalem and was comprised of followers of the earthly Jesus. In your reflection, does Jerusalem continue to hold significance for the church today? Why or why not?

The writer of Acts lists eleven names of those apostles who came together following the resurrection and ascension of Jesus. Judas Iscariot by his own actions is excluded. But the writer of Acts makes no other mention of many of these apostles in the remainder of the book. How might we come to understand their involvement (or lack of) in the ministry of the early church? What connections do we make with the particular persons described in Acts and their ministry with the purposefulness and practice of the Christian mission today?

SUNDAY, MAY 16, 2021

ACTS 2:1-4

When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. And suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability.

Pentecost, in the time of Acts, was a Jewish late Spring festival fifty days after Passover. The writer of Acts describes the Pentecost that followed fifty days after Jesus' death. The passage is filled with divine actions, audible and visible, which ushers in a new vision and responsibility for followers of Jesus. The miracle of the church's birth in the empowering presence of the Holy Spirit can only be perceived through simile- a sound like the rush of a violent wind, divided tongues as of fire. All who were present were now filled with the Holy Spirit. The phrase, "filled with the Holy Spirit" characterizes many who came to be faithful representatives of the church. Pray and reflect upon the manner in which "filled with the Holy Spirit" applies to your faith walk, in awareness and in action.

MONDAY, MAY 17, 2021

ACTS 2:5-8

Now there were devout Jews from every nation under heaven living in Jerusalem. And at this sound the crowd gathered and was bewildered, because each one heard them speaking in the native language of each. Amazed and astonished, they asked, "Are not all these who are speaking Galileans? And how is it that we hear, each of us, in our native language?"

The Word of God is to be communicated. Our faith is shared as it is spoken and written. It is to be shared in ways that contribute to understanding, to promote participation and fellowship. Imagine the experience of those who were gathered at Pentecost, people from many different regions with differing languages, aware of the difficulties that can hinder understanding. At this Pentecost the church was given the Spirit-filled capacity to speak in ways that foster understanding for the whole people of God.

Prayerfully reflect upon the ways that the Holy Spirit enables and directs you to share the gospel that enhances understanding and participation as the church for the world. What is God speaking through you?

TUESDAY, MAY 18, 2021

ACTS 2:9-13

“Parthians, Medes, Elamites, and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabs- in our own languages we hear them speaking about God’s deeds of power.” All were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, “What does this mean?” But others sneered and said, “They are filled with new wine.”

Many of these place names may seem distant to us, spatially and temporally. Maybe some of us have had the opportunity to visit such places but for others they are but places on the map and occasionally referred to in the news. But in this reading, the people were both amazed and perplexed at this miracle of proclamation. Yet others dismissed it as an offering of intoxication.

How do you understand the sharing of the gospel and your part in it? Does it contain the miraculous? Does it both amaze and perplex? And how do you deal in those times when the sharing of the gospel is dismissed by others, for whatever the reasons?

WEDNESDAY, MAY 19, 2021

ACTS 2:14-15

But Peter, standing with the eleven, raised his voice and addressed them, “Men of Judea and all who live in Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and listen to what I say. Indeed, these are not drunk, as you suppose, for it is only nine o’clock in the morning.”

Peter asserts that the Spirit-filled and directed proclamation of the gospel in languages for all to hear and understand is not gibberish, is not an alcohol-fueled babble that sews confusion and doubt. It is but the beginning of something new and viable though with links to the Jewish heritage, the words of the prophets, and the life-giving and enhancing role of scripture.

How does your raised voice in word and action celebrate the proclamation of the gospel and the continuance of the work of the Holy Spirit in bearing witness to the resurrection of Jesus and the on-going mission of the church? How are you able to address all doubts and concerns through prayer and witness?

THURSDAY, MAY 20, 2021

ACTS 2:16-21

“No, this is what was spoken through the prophet Joel: ‘In the last days it will be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams. Even upon my slaves, both men and women, in those days I will pour out my Spirit; and they shall prophesy. And I will show portents in the heaven above and signs on the earth below, blood, and fire, and smoky mist. The sun shall be turned to darkness and the moon to blood, before the coming of the Lord’s great and glorious day. Then everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.’”

In this passage, Peter quotes from the prophet Joel envisioning God’s Spirit being poured out upon all flesh, all peoples, young and old, female and male, slave and free, an inclusive gift for all. The Spirit is given that all may testify, prophesy to God’s way of salvation.

How are we to understand salvation? How does this understanding impact the manner by which we live a life of faith in the present? How do you see salvation at work in your life and in the lives of others, of different ethnicities, habits and lifestyles, of differing beliefs?

In this speech from Peter, the writer of Acts inserts “In the last days,” a phrase that does not appear in the prophecy of Joel from the Old testament. Why do you think that the phrase was inserted in the context of Peter’s speech? What might the “last days” refer to? How might the “last days” be related to our present time?

FRIDAY, MAY 21, 2021

ACTS 2:22-24

“You that are Israelites, listen to what I have to say: Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested to you by God with deeds of power, wonders, and signs that God did through him among you, as you yourselves know- this man, handed over to you according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of those outside the law. But God raised him up, having freed him from death, because it was impossible for him to be held in its power.”

Peter’s speech expresses the great deeds of power and wonder exhibited by Jesus according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, a plan that brought about opposition and resistance to Jesus, culminating in his death by crucifixion. Prayerfully reflect upon an understanding contained in this text from Acts that Jesus’ death was in accordance with the will of God. How have you come to understand the death of Jesus, its cause and effect, the involvement of human actors in carrying out God’s plan? How, throughout history, has Christianity expressed theologically the death of Jesus?

Peter indicates that Jesus’ death is not the final word; God raised him up, for it was impossible for him to be held in its power. Prayerfully reflect upon your understanding of the relationship between Jesus’ death and his resurrection, and what significance it has on your faith perspective.

SATURDAY, MAY 22, 2021

ACTS 2:32-36

“This Jesus God raised up, and of that all of us are witnesses. Being therefore exalted at the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he has poured out this that you both see and hear...Therefore let the entire house of Israel know with certainty that God has made him both Lord and Messiah, this Jesus whom you crucified.”

We have come to believe in the resurrection of Jesus because of the faithful witnesses like Peter who testified to this truth. Peter notes that the risen Jesus bears the promise of God and the power of the Holy Spirit. Peter indicates that the risen Jesus is exalted at the right hand of God. What is your understanding of this image? And how might this image inform an understanding of Jesus as Lord and Messiah? And need we always keep in mind Jesus’ crucifixion to properly understand his Lordship?

SUNDAY, MAY 23, 2021

ACTS 2:37-42

Now when they heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and to the other apostles, "Brothers, what should we do?" Peter said to them, "Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ so that your sins may be forgiven; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is for you, for your children, and for all who are far away, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to him." And he testified with many other arguments and exhorted them, saying, "Save yourselves from this corrupt generation." So those who welcomed his message were baptized, and that day about three thousand persons were added. They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.

Aware of Jesus' death and resurrection and the saving activity of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, how and why are we driven to repentance? And how is our baptism related to the gift of the Holy Spirit and the forgiveness of sins? What does repentance mean to you? And what shape does this repentance take in your Christian life?

Peter indicates that God's promise in Christ is for those who are near and for those who are far off across the generations. How is God's promise in Christ alive and active in your life? And how does God's saving promise impact the "corruptness" of our own generation? How does our devotion to God and fellowship with one another bear upon God's promise?

MONDAY, MAY 24, 2021

ACTS 2:43-47

Awe came upon everyone, because many wonders and signs were being done by the apostles. All who believed were together and had all things in common; they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need. Day by day, as they spent much time together in the temple, they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having the goodwill of all the people. And day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved.

The early church's awareness of the many wonders and signs of God's activity in Christ and through the Spirit drew together people from all walks of life into a unity of faith and social responsibility. The church shared freely in addressing

whatever needs arose throughout the community. They were of generous hearts.

Prayerfully reflect on how your understanding of faith is to be connected to the formation of community and the sharing of God's gifts (spiritual and material) to meet the needs of all.

TUESDAY, MAY 25, 2021

ACTS 3:1-7

One day Peter and John were going up to the temple at the hour of prayer, at three o'clock in the afternoon. And a man lame from birth was being carried in. People would lay him daily at the gate of the temple called the Beautiful Gate so that he could ask for alms from those entering the temple. When he saw Peter and John about to go into the temple, he asked them for alms. Peter looked intently at him, as did John, and said, "Look at us." And he fixed his attention on them, expecting to receive something from them. But Peter said, "I have no silver or gold, but what I have I give you; in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, stand up and walk." And he took him by the right hand and raised him up; and immediately his feet and ankles were made strong.

As you read this text, what connections are you able to make regarding how your faith may respond to those who are in need of healing? How does your prayer life connect with those experiencing disease, discomfort or displacement?

What do you believe is possible when you faithfully invoke the name of Jesus Christ? What power does the name of Jesus convey in our time and place? Are you able to see yourself as an instrument of God's healing? And if so, how do you put this understanding into action?

WEDNESDAY, MAY 26, 2021

ACTS 3:12-16

Peter addressed the people, "You Israelites, why do you wonder at this, or why do you stare at us, as though by our own power or piety we had made him walk? The God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, the God of our ancestors has glorified his servant Jesus, whom you handed over and rejected in the presence of Pilate, though he had decided to release him. But you rejected the Holy and righteous One and asked to have a murderer given to you, and you killed

the Author of life, whom God raised from the dead. To this we are witnesses. And by faith in his name, his name itself has made this man strong, whom you see and know; and the faith that is through Jesus has given him this perfect health in the presence of all of you.”

Peter indicates that the God of our ancestors is a living God continuing to do wonders in the world even when faced with resistance and rejection. The work of God works in and through humanity but the power and the effectiveness are from the God who raised Jesus from the dead. Prayerfully reflect upon the wonders of God at work in our time and place- in your life, in the lives of others, and throughout creation. In what ways do you personally bear witness to these wonders of God?

In what ways do you feel God working in you to bring healing and wholeness in our world?

THURSDAY, MAY 27, 2021

ACTS 3:17-21

“And now, friends, I know that you acted in ignorance, as did your rulers. In this way God fulfilled what he had foretold through all the prophets, that his Messiah would suffer. Repent therefore, and turn to God so that your sins may be wiped out, so that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord, and that he may send the Messiah appointed for you, that is, Jesus, who must remain in heaven until the time of universal restoration that God announced long ago through his holy prophets.”

As you prayerfully reflect upon this speech from Peter to those who witnessed a healing but were troubled by the apostles’ actions, pray for release from ignorance in thought, word, and deed. Pray also that those who are called to be leaders will also be released from any and all ignorance that harkens discord, disunity, and disbelief.

How are you able to experience the promised “times of refreshing that come from the presence of the Lord” in your faith journey?

This speech of Peter speaks about a “time of universal restoration.” As you prayerfully reflect upon this phrase, how do you envision this anticipated “universal restoration?”

FRIDAY, MAY 28, 2021

ACTS 3:24-26

“And all the prophets, as many as have spoken, from Samuel and those after him, also predicted these days. You are the descendants of the prophets and of the covenant that God gave to your ancestors, saying to Abraham, ‘And in your descendants all the families of the earth shall be blessed.’ When God raised up his servant, he sent him first to you, to bless you by turning each of you from your wicked ways.”

The God who raised Jesus from the dead is the same God who made covenant with Israel and spoke through the holy prophets from Samuel onwards, words and actions that both preceded as well as anticipated the promise of God that would be revealed in Jesus.

How are you able to make the connection between the blessing given to Abraham with the life of Jesus as Lord and Messiah? In other words, how do you understand both the historical and the theological relationship of Christianity with Judaism? How are Christians to address the incidents of anti-Semitism that persist in our world today?

SATURDAY, MAY 29, 2021

ACTS 4:8-12

Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them, “Rulers of the people and elders, if we are questioned today because of a good deed done to someone who was sick and are asked how this man has been healed, let it be known to all of you, and to all the people of Israel, that this man is standing before you in good health by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead. This Jesus is ‘the stone that was rejected by you, the builders; it has become the cornerstone.’ There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among mortals by which we must be saved.”

This passage reveals that Peter was filled with the Holy Spirit. How do you perceive the role of the Holy Spirit in your life and the life of the church? How are you able to testify to the presence of the Holy Spirit in today’s world?

Though rejected by some, the risen Jesus remains the “cornerstone” of God’s way of salvation. Peter states that salvation only comes by the way of Jesus.

Prayerfully reflect on the meaning of salvation and its relationship to the gift of faith and the life of the church in which you participate? How is salvation related to eternal life?

SUNDAY, MAY 30, 2021

ACTS 4:32-35

Now the whole group of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one claimed private ownership of any possessions, but everything they owned was held in common. With great power the apostles gave their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all. There was not a needy person among them, for as many as owned lands or houses sold them and brought the proceeds of what was sold. They laid it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to each as any had need.

This summary addresses the togetherness of the early church as one another used whatever resources they had to be shared in ways to benefit the whole community. Such action derived from the power given to the faithful to proclaim the resurrection of Jesus and in reception of the great grace from God. Prayerfully reflect upon the manner in which the grace of God has been exhibited in your life and in your participation as part of the church?

Faithfully imagine the role of the church when the faithful fully trust and act within and by the power of God's grace. What has God given you in order to be shared with the whole people of God?

MONDAY, MAY 31, 2021

ACTS 5:12-16

Now many signs and wonders were done among the people through the apostles. And they were all together in Solomon's Portico. None of the rest dared to join them, but the people held them in high esteem. Yet more than ever believers were added to the Lord, great numbers of both men and women, so that they even carried out the sick into the streets, and laid them on cots and mats, in order that Peter's shadow might fall on some of them as he came by. A great number of people would also gather from the towns around Jerusalem, bringing the sick and those tormented by unclean spirits, and they were all cured.

The church blessed and empowered by the Holy Spirit and witnessed to by followers of the risen Jesus is a church that works in its togetherness amazing

signs and wonders. What signs and wonders have you witnessed and testified to as you participate in the church?

In what ways have you seen the church as an instrument of healing and hope for any who are in need? How is and how should the church be connected to any and all who are broken of body, spirit, or relationship? Is and should a healing ministry be an essential part of the church's mission in our time and place? This passage presumes that many believed that just being in the presence of a faithful person like Peter would be enough to generate healing. How do you perceive that others might feel in your presence?

TUESDAY, JUNE 1, 2021

ACTS 5:17-21

Then the high priest took action; he and all who were with him (that is, the sect of the Sadducees), being filled with jealousy, arrested the apostles and put them in the public prison. But during the night an angel of the Lord opened the prison doors, brought them out, and said, "Go, stand in the temple and tell the people the whole message about this life." When they heard this, they entered the temple at daybreak and went on with their teaching.

Being the church is risky! There are those who do not want to hear about the good news that is Jesus and will do whatever is in their power to bring threats and accusations against the faithful and the church. Resistance to the gospel and persecution of the faithful is always a real possibility. Our defense as Christians is not by the power of the sword but through God's awareness that we can be released from whatever many imprison us so that we can "go" and share to good news of Jesus.

Jealousy works against real faith; it hinders the new reality of life in the risen Christ. Prayerfully consider the times in your life when you may have been motivated by jealousy or envy as opposed to those occasions when you placed your full trust in the good news of Jesus and its power of new life in him.

WEDNESDAY, JUNE 2, 2021

ACTS 5:25-32

Then someone arrived and announced, "Look, the men whom you put in prison are standing in the temple and teaching the people!" Then the captain went with the temple police and brought them, but without violence, for they were afraid of

being stoned by the people. When they had brought them, they had them stand before the council. The high priest questioned them, saying, "We gave you strict orders not to teach in this name, yet here you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching and you are determined to bring this man's blood on us." But Peter and the apostles answered, "We must obey God rather than any human authority. The God of our ancestors raised up Jesus, whom you had killed by hanging him on a tree. God exalted him at his right hand as Leader and Savior that he might give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins. And we are witnesses to these things, and so is the Holy Spirit whom God has given to those who obey him."

Throughout history, there have been numerous attempts to silence Christianity through threats and violence. In Acts 5, the writer depicts a scene in which some apostles were imprisoned for their belief and their public teaching, but by an act of God they were released back into their public acknowledgement of Jesus' resurrection and the living gospel. Prayerfully reflect on the ways that you have been able to share the gospel even in difficult and challenging situations.

In this section, Peter proclaims that, as followers of Jesus, obedience need be directed to God's plan of action and not in submission to human authority. How have you and how are you able to remain obedient to the will of God over against submitting to human wants and desires? And how do you experience the Holy Spirit in your life that enables you to distinguish between the work of God and that of the human will that remains in need of forgiveness?

THURSDAY, JUNE 3, 2021

ACTS 5:33-39

When they heard this, they were enraged and wanted to kill them. But a Pharisee in the council named Gamaliel, a teacher of the law, respected by all the people, stood up and ordered the men to be put outside for a short time. Then he said to them, "Fellow Israelites, consider carefully what you propose to do to these men... In the present case, I tell you, keep away from these men and let them alone; because if this plan or this undertaking is of human origin, it will fail; but if it is of God, you will not be able to overthrow them- in that case you may even be found fighting against God!"

In this passage, the reader is introduced to the counsel of Gamaliel, a wise and respected religious authority. He cautions those who would seek to silence

Peter and the other apostles- consider carefully what actions are proposed for human want may be opposed drastically to the will of God. Implicitly, Gamaliel is indicating that the Christian movement may very well be of God's choosing, so best not to fight against it. Time will tell. How has the history of Christianity and your own faith journey revealed the promised hand of God, particularly in times of resistance and doubt? Do you find yourself ever hesitant is sharing the gospel, and if so, what enables you to overcome such hesitancy?

FRIDAY, JUNE 4, 2021

ACTS 5:40-42

They were convinced by him, and when they had called in the apostles, they had them flogged. Then they ordered them not to speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go. As they left the council, they rejoiced that they were considered worthy to suffer dishonor for the sake of the name. And every day in the temple and at home they did not cease to teach and proclaim Jesus as the Messiah.

There are still places in our world where people are ordered to stay silent in matters about Jesus, places where it is illegal to promote the Christian faith. And yet even in the face of punishment and imprisonment, there are those faithful and courageous ones who will champion the faith and continue to bear witness to Jesus, just as was reported of the apostles in Acts 5. They felt worthy to suffer for the sake of Jesus' name and the continuance of ministry.

Give thoughtful prayer to the sufferings and persecutions that Christians endure in today's world. In what ways are you able to witness to Jesus and promote the Christian faith in today's challenging circumstances?

SATURDAY, JUNE 5, 2021

ACTS 6:8-7:1

Stephen, full of grace and power, did great wonders and signs among the people. Then some of those who belonged to the synagogue of the Freedmen (as it was called), Cyrenians, Alexandrians, and others of those from Cilicia and Asia, stood up and argued with Stephen. But they could not withstand the wisdom and the Spirit with which he spoke. Then they secretly instigated some men to say, "We have heard him speak blasphemous words against Moses and God." They stirred up the people as well as the elders and the scribes; then they suddenly confronted him, and brought him before the council. They set up false witnesses who said, "This man never stops saying things against this holy place and the law; for we

have heard him say that this Jesus of Nazareth will destroy this place and will change the customs that Moses handed on to us.” And all who sat in the council looked intently at him, and they saw that his face was like the face of an angel. Then the high priest asked him, “Are these things so?”

In Acts 6-7, Stephen is described as one who was full of grace and power, expressed with wisdom and the Spirit. Others perceived that he was speaking blasphemy, dismissive of the Jewish traditions handed on from the time of Moses when he (Stephen) was witnessing about Jesus. Opposition to Jesus was fueled with false witness. Even so, they were able to notice an angelic countenance upon Stephen.

Prayerfully reflect upon the faith courage that empowers and enables Christians to speak the truth of Jesus in very challenging times. How have you and how are you able to share your face when others don't seem interested in listening?

SUNDAY, JUNE 6, 2021

ACTS 7:2, 51-54

And Stephen replied: “Brothers and fathers, listen to me... You stiff-necked people, uncircumcised in heart and ears, you are forever opposing the Holy Spirit, just as your ancestors used to do. Which of the prophets did your ancestors not persecute? They killed those who foretold the coming of the Righteous One, and now you have become his betrayers and murderers. You are the ones that received the law as ordained by angels, and yet you have not kept it.” When they heard these things, they became enraged and ground their teeth at Stephen.

Stephen addresses his audience as family, those who have shared a deep bond of godly reverence and faith tradition. But they are now resistant to the present working of the Spirit; they remain “uncircumcised in heart and ears” as a stiff-necked people. Are there ways, intentional or not, that we may resist the working of the Holy Spirit in our time, when we hold on to and cling to customs and traditions that may not represent where and how God is leading us now? How and where might the Holy Spirit be directing your life this very moment?

MONDAY, JUNE 7, 2021

ACTS 7:55-8:3

But filled with the Holy Spirit, Stephen gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God and Jesus standing at the right hand of God. “Look,” he said, “I see the heavens

opened and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God!" But they covered their ears, and with a loud shout all rushed together against him. Then they dragged him out of the city and began to stone him; and the witnesses laid their coats at the feet of a young man named Saul. While they were stoning Stephen, he prayed, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." Then he knelt down and cried out in a loud voice, "Lord, do not hold this sin against them." When he had said this, he died. And Saul approved of their killing him. That day a severe persecution began against the church in Jerusalem, and all except the apostles were scattered throughout the countryside of Judea and Samaria. Devout men buried Stephen and made loud lamentation over him. But Saul was ravaging the church by entering house after house; dragging off both men and women, he committed them to prison.

Filled with the Holy Spirit, Stephen was able to perceive the real presence of Jesus, the Son of Man who was at the right hand of God in the heavens.

Prayerfully reflect upon the ways that the Holy Spirit enables you to experience the real presence of Jesus in your life and the life of the church. This text in Acts reminds the faithful that there will be those times when proclamation of the presence of Jesus will be met with resistance and violence. Stephen met this violence by remaining faithful and calling upon God to receive his spirit and for God not to hold the sinful actions of those who brought him pain against them. How would we respond in like situations?

What impressions of Saul/ Paul do we have upon hearing that he brought severe persecution upon the church, often in a violent manner? Today, we live in a world fraught with violence. How as Christians should we respond? Is there a place for revenge or retribution in the Christian context?

TUESDAY, JUNE 8, 2021

ACTS 8:9- 13

Now a certain man named Simon has previously practiced magic in the city and amazed the people of Samaria, saying that he was someone great. All of them, from the least to the greatest, listened to him eagerly, saying, "this man is the power of God that is called Great." And they listened eagerly to him because for a long time he had amazed them with magic. But when they believed Philip, who was proclaiming the good news about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women. Even Simon himself believed.

After being baptized, he stayed constantly with Philip and was amazed when he saw the signs and great miracles that took place.

People continue to be amazed by magic- illusions, slight-of-hand, etc. In the text for today, people throughout Samaria were amazed at the magic of one named Simon, even thinking that he somehow possessed God-like power. But these same people also were influenced by the gospel of Jesus that Philip proclaimed, and subsequently were baptized. Even Simon the magician was converted to the truth of the gospel and the promised kingdom of God, recognizing the real power of God at work in Jesus and not through illusionary acts of magic.

How do you experience the power of God at work in the proclamation of the gospel of Jesus? Do you believe that the risen Jesus continues to present and work the miraculous in our time? How do you see yourself as part of the working of God's miracles in your life?

WEDNESDAY, JUNE 9, 2021

ACTS 8:14-24

Now when the apostles at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had accepted the word of God, they sent Peter and John to them. The two went down and prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit (for as yet the Spirit had not come upon any of them; they had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus). Then Peter and John laid their hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit. Now when Simon saw that the Spirit was given through the laying on of the apostles' hands, he offered them money, saying, "Give me also this power so that anyone on whom I lay my hands may receive the Holy Spirit." But Peter said to him, "May your silver perish with you, because you thought you could obtain God's gift with money! You have no part or share in this, for your heart is not right before God. Repent therefore of this wickedness of yours, and pray to the Lord that, if possible, the intent of your heart may be forgiven you. For I see that you are in the gall of bitterness and the chains of wickedness." Simon answered, "Pray for me to the Lord, that nothing of what you have said may happen to me."

In this text, Simon, even in becoming a believer, believed that one could gain further access to God and God's power through some purchasing mechanism. His heart was not in the right place; even as a believer he needed to repent- to turn again in the right direction of God's power and mercy, a gift not able to be

bought. The presence and power of God in Christ through the Spirit come to us as purely gift. Prayerfully reflect upon the gifts of grace, mercy, forgiveness, and salvation that we receive in Christ and through the working of the Holy Spirit.

THURSDAY, JUNE 10, 2021

ACTS 8:26-31

Then an angel of the Lord said to Philip, "Get up and go toward the south to the road that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza." (This is a wilderness road.) So, he got up and went. Now there was an Ethiopian eunuch, a court official of the Candace, queen of the Ethiopians, in charge of her entire treasury. He had come to Jerusalem to worship and was returning home; seated in his chariot, he was reading the prophet Isaiah. Then the Spirit said to Philip, "Go over to this chariot and join it." So, Philip ran up to it and heard him reading the prophet Isaiah. He asked, "Do you understand what you are reading?" He replied, "how can I, unless someone guides me?"

By an angel's word of God and through the guidance of the Holy Spirit, Philip was directed to enter uncharted territory (a wilderness road). Here he meets up with a person who had gone to Jerusalem to worship but by his ethnicity and physical deformity would have been considered an outsider by the religious authorities and probably would have been prevented from participating in the rituals of community worship.

How is the word of God and the direction of the Holy Spirit guiding the followers of the risen Jesus today to bring the gospel to those who are perceived to be on the "outside" by reason of appearance or belief? In what ways are you able to bring the word of God by the guidance of the Holy Spirit to those who for one reason or another have not been included and accepted in the life of the church?

FRIDAY, JUNE 11, 2021

ACTS 8:32-39

Now the passage of the scripture that he was reading was this: "Like a sheep he was led to the slaughter, and like a lamb silent before its shearer, so he does not open his mouth. In his humiliation justice was denied him. Who can describe his generation? For his life is taken away from the earth." The eunuch asked Philip, "About whom, may I ask you, does the prophet say this, about himself or about someone else?" Then Philip began to speak, and starting with this scripture, he

proclaimed to him the good news about Jesus. As they were going along the road, they came to some water; and the eunuch said, "Look, here is water! What is to prevent me from being baptized?" He commanded the chariot to stop, and both of them, Philip and the eunuch, went down into the water, and Philip baptized him. When they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord snatched Philip away; the eunuch saw him no more, and went on his way rejoicing.

The Ethiopian eunuch asks Philip to help him understand the prophetic scripture from Isaiah and its application into the present moment. The question relates Old Testament prophecy to the presentation of God's promises and fulfillment in the life of Jesus and the Spirit-driven church. Give prayerful thought and reflection regarding your understanding of the promises of God revealed in prophetic scripture in relationship with the life of Jesus and the church.

Sacramentally, the church attaches God's word of promise and fulfillment with the material expressions of water (baptism) and bread and wine (the Lord's Supper) and connects them to the gift of the Holy Spirit. Again, give prayerful thought to your understanding of the sacraments of baptism and the Lord's Supper in relationship to the present activity of God in Christ and the Spirit-driven mission of the church in our time.

SATURDAY, JUNE 12, 2021

ACTS 9:1-9

Meanwhile Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest and asked him for letters to the synagogues at Damascus, so that if he found any who belonged to the Way, men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem. Now as he was going along and approaching Damascus, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him. He fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to him, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?" He asked, "Who are you, Lord?" The reply came, "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. But get up and enter the city, and you will be told what you are to do." The men traveling with him stood speechless because they heard the voice but saw no one. Saul got up from the ground, and though his eyes were open, he could see nothing; so, they led him by the hand and brought him into Damascus. For three days he was without sight, and neither ate nor drank.

In this passage, Saul/ Paul is confronted by the risen Jesus regarding Saul's prior persecution of the church, expressed as a direct persecution of Jesus himself. As a Christian today, how are your thoughts and actions directly related to your relationship with the risen Jesus? Do you believe that what you think and do has a direct effect on Jesus? How might the word/ voice of Jesus that you hear/ receive in your daily walk influence how you will live out your life today and in preparation for tomorrow? In what ways do our thoughts and actions bring hurt upon Jesus? And in what ways will they bring healing to the people whom Jesus loves?

SUNDAY, JUNE 13, 2021

ACTS 9:10-22

Now there was a disciple in Damascus named Ananias. The Lord said to him in a vision, "Ananias." He answered, "Here I am, Lord." The Lord said to him, "Get up and go to the street called Straight, and at the house of Judas look for a man of Tarsus named Saul. At this moment he is praying, and he has seen in a vision a man named Ananias come in and lay his hands on him so that he might regain his sight." But Ananias answered, "Lord, I have heard from many about this man, how much evil he has done to your saints in Jerusalem; and here he has authority from the chief priests to bind all who invoke your name." But the Lord said to him, "Go, for he is an instrument whom I have chosen to bring my name before Gentiles and kings and before the people of Israel; I myself will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name." So, Ananias went and entered the house. He laid his hands on Saul and said, "Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on your way here, has sent me so that you may regain your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit." And immediately something like scales fell from his eyes, and his sight was restored. Then he got up and was baptized, and after taking some food, he regained his strength. For several days he was with the disciples in Damascus, and immediately he began to proclaim Jesus in the synagogues, saying "He is the Son of God." All who heard him were amazed and said, "Is not this the man who made havoc in Jerusalem among those who invoked this name? And has he not come here for the purpose of bringing them bound before the chief priests?" Saul became increasingly more powerful and confounded the Jews who lived in Damascus by proving that Jesus was the Messiah.

This text is often referred to as Saul's/ Paul's conversion experience. In his encounter with the risen Jesus, he becomes a changed man. Now filled with the Holy Spirit and baptized in Jesus' name, he proclaims the risen Jesus as the Son of God and Messiah. Spend a few moments prayerfully reflecting upon this experience of Saul/ Paul. Focus on the actions, the emotions, and the response of those around him who were affected by this encounter. Pray upon the many and various ways that an encounter with the risen Jesus impacts your life; how is your life changed by such encounters? How do others in your midst experience your life in Christ?

MONDAY, JUNE 14, 2021

ACTS 10:1-8

In Caesarea there was a man named Cornelius, a centurion of the Italian Cohort, as it was called. He was a devout man who feared God with all his household; he gave alms generously to the people and prayed constantly to God. One afternoon at about three o'clock he had a vision in which he clearly saw an angel of God coming in and saying to him, "Cornelius." He stared at him in terror and said, "What is it, Lord?" He answered, "Your prayers and your alms have ascended as a memorial before God. Now send men to Joppa for a certain Simon who is called Peter; he is lodging with Simon, a tanner, whose house is by the seaside." When the angel who spoke to him had left, he called two of his slaves and a devout soldier from the ranks of those who served him, and after telling them everything, he sent them to Joppa.

This is the beginning of an extended narrative of visions and experiences exchanged between a Gentile of Roman status named Cornelius and Peter the apostle. The narrative depicts the spread of and acceptance of the gospel of Jesus among the Gentile community. Cornelius is presented as one who feared God and contributed generously to those in material need, but he was not a proselyte, a Gentile who had become a Jew through the rite of circumcision. Nevertheless, an angel of God visits him in a vision. Cornelius is stunned as he hears the angel sharing that God has recognized Cornelius' generosity and prayer life and now calls upon him to make a connection with Peter. This vision is retold three times in this narrative (10:22, 30-32, and 11:13-14). Prayerfully reflect upon the manner in which God addresses you and calls you into service

of the gospel. Where might God be leading you at this moment in order to share the gospel?

TUESDAY, JUNE 15, 2021

ACTS 10:9-16

About noon the next day, as they were on their journey and approaching the city, Peter went up on the roof to pray. He became hungry and wanted something to eat; and while it was being prepared, he fell into a trance. He saw the heaven opened and something like a large sheet coming down, being lowered to the ground by its four corners. In it were all kinds of four-footed creatures and reptiles and birds of the air. Then he heard a voice saying, "Get up, Peter; kill and eat." But Peter said, "By no means, Lord; for I have never eaten anything that is profane or unclean." The voice said to him again, a second time, "What God has made clean, you must not call profane." This happened three times, and the thing was suddenly taken up to heaven.

Up until this moment, Peter's Jewish faith fostered an understanding of distinctions and differences: clean versus unclean, sacred versus profane, lawful versus lawful. These distinctions and differences affected the material world and the world of human relationships and other living things, a world of habits and preferences. All this for Peter changed in an instance, in a vision that had forever consequences upon an understanding of the Christian faith: "What God has made clean, you must not call profane." How have you come to understand this statement in your Christian journey? How does this statement impact the perception of your relationships with those who look, think, believe, and act differently?

WEDNESDAY, JUNE 16, 2021

ACTS 10:34-43

Then Peter began to speak to them: "I truly understand that God shows no partiality, but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him. You know the message he sent to the people of Israel, preaching peace by Jesus Christ- he is Lord of all. That message spread throughout Judea, beginning in Galilee after the baptism that John announced: how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power; how he went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with him. We are witnesses to all that he did both in Judea and in Jerusalem. They

put him to death by hanging him on a tree; but God raised him on the third day and allowed him to appear, not to all people but to us who were chosen by God as witnesses, and who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead. He commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one ordained by God as judge of the living and the dead. All the prophets testify about him that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name.”

THURSDAY, JUNE 17, 2021

ACTS 10:44-48

While Peter was still speaking, the Holy Spirit fell upon all who heard the word. The circumcised believers who had come with Peter were astounded that the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out even on the Gentiles, for they heard them speaking in tongues and extolling God. Then Peter said, “Can anyone withhold the water for baptizing these people who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?” So, he ordered them to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. Then they invited him to stay for several days.

Who does Jesus represent- Jew or Gentile or both? That was a concern of the early church as addressed in Acts. Both the ministries of Peter and Paul reached out into the nations persuading both Jew and Gentile alike that Jesus is Lord of all. Concerns were raised though regarding traditions and rituals that reached far back into Israel’s history; what of the past should continue and what of the present working of the Holy Spirit should be lifted up? In other words, does baptism in the name of Jesus take on a role that in the past was reserved for circumcision? And what gifts of the Holy Spirit guide the church today in matters of ritual and ceremonial importance, of actions moral and legal, and relationships with those who think differently?

FRIDAY, JUNE 18, 2021

ACTS 13:16, 26-33, 38-40

So, Paul stood up and with a gesture began to speak: “You Israelites, and others who fear God, listen... My brothers, you descendants of Abraham’s family, and others who fear God, to us the message of this salvation has been sent. Because the residents of Jerusalem and their leaders did not recognize him or understand the words of the prophets that are read every sabbath, they fulfilled those words by condemning him. Even though they found no cause for a sentence of death, they asked Pilate to have him killed. When they had carried out everything that

was written about him, they took him down from the tree and laid him in a tomb. But God raised him from the dead; and for many days he appeared to those who came up with him from Galilee to Jerusalem, and they are now his witnesses to the people. And we bring you the good news that what God promised to our ancestors he has fulfilled for us, their children, by raising Jesus... Let it be known to you therefore, my brothers, that through this man forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you; by this Jesus everyone who believes is set free from all those sins from which you could not be freed by the law of Moses. Beware, therefore, that what the prophets said does not happen to you."

Give prayerful thought and reflection on the gift of forgiveness, being set free from sin and guided by the Spirit into a life of hope. Pray upon the gift of the resurrection and life eternal.

SATURDAY, JUNE 19, 2021

ACTS 13:44-48

The next sabbath almost the whole city gathered to hear the word of the Lord. But when the Jews saw the crowds, they were filled with jealousy; and blaspheming, they contradicted what was spoken by Paul. Then both Paul and Barnabas spoke out boldly, saying, "It was necessary that the word of God should be spoken first to you. Since you reject it and judge yourselves to be unworthy of eternal life, we are now turning to the Gentiles. For so the Lord has commanded us, saying, 'I have set you to be a light for the Gentiles, so that you may bring salvation to the ends of the earth.'" When the Gentiles heard this, they were glad and praised the word of the Lord; and as many as had been destined for eternal life became believers.

In this passage, the writer of Acts reports that some Jews objected to the proclamation of the resurrection of Jesus as a fulfillment of the promise that was revealed to the Jews. Filled with jealousy, they were unwilling to accept that both Jew and Gentile could receive forgiveness of sins through him. God in Christ unites all peoples; in him there is life that moves beyond the bounds of death. In what ways are you able to offer praise to God in Christ?

SUNDAY, JUNE 20, 2021

ACTS 15:5-11

But some believers who belonged to the sect of the Pharisees stood up and said, "It is necessary for them to be circumcised and ordered to keep the law of Moses." The apostles and the elders met together to consider this matter. After there had

been much debate, Peter stood up and said to them, “My brothers, you know that in the early days God made a choice among you, that I should be the one through whom the Gentiles would hear the message of the good news and become believers. And God, who knows the human heart, testified to them by giving them the Holy Spirit, just as he did to us; and in cleansing their hearts by faith he has made no distinction between them and us. Now therefore why are you putting God to the test by placing on the neck of the disciples a yoke that neither our ancestors nor we have been able to bear? On the contrary, we believe that we will be saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, just as they will.”

As Acts 15 describes, there was disagreement surrounding an argument that addressed the requirements for inclusion into the Christian community. Owing to its historic relationship with Judaism, some believed that Christians need also maintain a ritual and ceremonial connection with Judaism as well as following the law as prescribed from Mount Sinai. Prayerfully reflect upon your understanding of the relationship between Christianity and Judaism, particularly in keeping the law (the Ten Commandments). How does the law as found in the Old Testament relate to the counsel given by Jesus?

In the church today, do we place any obstacles or obligations for inclusion into the Christian community? How would you relate the salvation we have by and through the grace of the Lord Jesus with respect to the keeping of the law/ commandments?

MONDAY, JUNE 21, 2021

ACTS 17:22-32

Then Paul stood in front of the Areopagus and said, “Athenians, I see how extremely religious you are in every way. 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.’ What therefore you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you. The God who made the world and everything in it, he who is Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in shrines made by human hands, 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. 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, so that they would search for God and perhaps grope for him and find him- though indeed he is not far from each

one of us. 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." Since we are God's offspring, 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. While God has overlooked the times of human ignorance, now he commands all people everywhere to repent, because he has fixed a day on which he will have the world judged in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed, and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead." When they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some scoffed; but others said, "We will hear you again about this."

Because of Christ, we are able to fully know God, God's promises, God's presence in our lives, God's and our future. In Christ, we come to know that God overlooks the times of our ignorance and shortcomings and embraces us with righteousness; we know this in Christ Jesus for God raised him from the dead! Prayerfully reflect on the gift of resurrection and the new life we have in Christ.