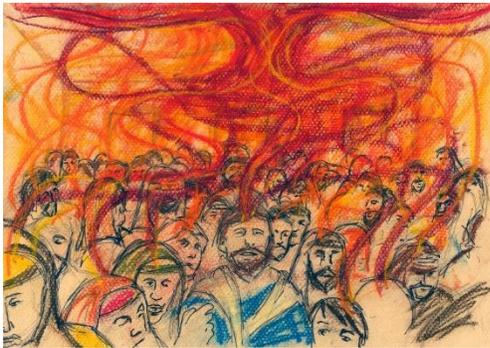


# Notes for Brian's Sermon at Brentwood Presbyterian Church

Sun, June 23, 2019

## What is the Focus of *The Acts of the Apostles*?

(Ps 97 and Acts 1:1-11)



**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.  
(Acts 1:8)**

### Insights from the story within the story

I'm constantly amazed at how greatly well-informed people can differ when seeing or reading the same thing – have you ever wondered about that? – does it frustrate you as much as it does me at times? – why can't you all just agree with me? – after all, I'm clearly the one who sees things right here! – when I get into this space, one of the ways the Holy Spirit brings me back to a proper humility is to remind me of the diverse views of God's reconciling love in Jesus Christ that she has preserved in our Scriptures – there's not one 'approved' gospel, but four – with very different takes on the same events – and then there's the stories remembered in Acts about the differences among our ancestors in the faith over what this new humanity inaugurated in the risen Jesus was all about – to what, precisely, for that time and those places, did the Holy Spirit empower them to witness? – and how, as we inherit their mantle, are we to witness “to the ends of the earth.” – gifted by the Holy Spirit with the power to witness to the Kingdom/Commonwealth/Reign/Kindom of God – that's what *The Acts of the Apostles* is all about – that's the focus of this account of the spread of the early church, with all its wonders and wisdom – so, we're going to spend the next 11 months or so exploring the ways these stories illuminate our stories of participating in the mission of Jesus Christ in our time and places

### Provocative points to ponder – as always, too many to cram into one sermon

- I've been asking my friends in the faith for suggestions on commentaries on Acts that I should consult as we embark on these explorations – the key ones that I will be using are:

Ernst Haenchen, *The Acts of the Apostles: A Commentary* (1971)  
N.T. Wright, *Acts for Everyone: Parts 1 & 2* (2008)  
Beverly Gaventa, *Acts* (2003)  
Willie James Jennings, *Acts* (2017)  
Jerome H. Neyrey (ed), *The Social World of Luke-Acts* (1991)  
Michael J. Gorman, *Becoming the Gospel: Paul, Participation, and Mission* (2015)

- Different people, with different backgrounds, dealing with the same text that tells crucial stories about the beginnings of our faith community, with different lenses that focus on different aspects of the richness of the witness of this crucial book in our Scriptures – I anticipate a fascinating journey of discovery and discernment in our conversations this coming year

### **How does this apply to our mission here at Brentwood?**

There are some key themes that have stood out for me early on in my considerations – I'll mention three of them this morning and I'm sure others will emerge from the Spirit's continuing illumination of our faith – first, this is a story about the crucified and risen Jesus, the Christ God sent to inaugurate the final phase of his reconciliation of the world to its original purpose – to be a place where love of God, love of neighbour, and love of self all align into blessing that benefits the whole world – second, the Holy Spirit empowers us to participate in the full and final realization of this work, constantly teaching us new and startling things about God's ways of working – third, the triune God (a concept that is itself a puzzling way of imagining the divine energy) will confront us with our fears, our failures, our misrepresentations of Jesus, our manipulations of the faith for our own advantages – all ways of rebelling against the purposes and promises of this God who encounters us in the crucified and risen Jesus – but that confrontation is one of love, born of a desire to reconcile and restore, and aimed at aligning us into the right ways of being blessings – so, the crucified and risen Jesus, the gifts of the Spirit, and ways of participating in their work – that's what we'll explore together in the next several months – I look forward to our journey together

### **My Notes**

### **My Prayers**

