



christ church
moreton

THE SPREADING FLAME

CHRIST CHURCH
HOME-GROUPS
Summer 2014



christ church
moreton

2014

Trust in the Lord with all your heart
and lean not on your own
understanding;
in all your ways submit to him,
and he will make your paths straight.

Proverbs 3:5-6

CHRIST CHURCH VISION 2017

- 1. To DEEPEN our commitment** to Christ and to one another
- 2. To INCREASE our relevance** to the people of Moreton
- 3. To RESPOND with compassion** to the needs in our community
- 4. To DEVELOP our evangelism** within our community and among our friends

Wednesday 7th May

PRAYER MEETING

Week beginning 12th May

Home-Group session 1

Week beginning 19th May

Home-Group session 2

Week beginning 26th May

Half Term

Wednesday 4th June

PRAYER MEETING

Week beginning 9th June

Home Group session 3

Week beginning 16th June

Home Group session 4

Week beginning 23rd June

Home Group session 5

Wednesday 2nd July

PRAYER MEETING

Week beginning 7th July

Home Group session 6

Week beginning 14th July

Home Group session 7

THE SPREADING FLAME

In the first part of this year we focussed on what Jesus did and taught – on Sundays in our morning service series ‘Listening to Jesus’ and in Home Groups through our reading of Matthew’s gospel.

The gospels end with Jesus’ resurrection, and his appearing to his disciples. Then, in Matthew and Luke, we read of Jesus ascending into heaven – his earthly ministry completed.

But actually, the story of Jesus didn’t end there. Luke wrote a second book, Acts, and he begins by telling us that in his gospel, he wrote *about all that Jesus began to do and to teach until the day he was taken up to heaven*. In other words, Acts contains what Jesus continued to do and teach, only this time he did it through his followers, as the Holy Spirit worked through them.

Some of what happened was unique to them – the Day of Pentecost was a one-off event. But much of what happened then can help us to see what it means for us in Moreton in 2014 to be the church God wants us to be.

These 7 studies pick up some of the events from the book of Acts, but there isn’t time to cover everything. Try to make time to read the whole book – and if there are things you read that you’d like to talk about, share them with members of your home group or with someone else at church. And in your home group, don’t be limited by the questions in this booklet – they are just a guide to get you started.

1. Beginning

WELCOME

What do you enjoy most – starting something new, or finishing something you have started?

WORSHIP

Our theme verse for this year encourages us to ‘Trust in the Lord with all your heart.’ Read Psalm 25, then thank the Lord for the ways he has guided you in the past, and pray that he will be guiding you as you read Acts together.

WORD

For Jesus’ disciples, it must have been the most stressful few weeks. First, they had seen him cheered into Jerusalem by crowds waving palm branches and shouting ‘Hosanna to the Son of David’ – proclaiming that Jesus was king! But only a few days later they had seen Jesus arrested, and all of them had deserted him. They had seen the crowd turn against him and yell for his death. They had seen him beaten and then crucified. Three days later, they had seen him alive again – but he was different. And finally, 40 days after his resurrection, they had been with him as he gave them his last instruction: *“All authority has in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”* Matthew 28:18-20

What a challenge. A small group of ordinary people, told to take the good news of Jesus everywhere. How could they possibly do that?

Read Acts 1:1-11

- ❖ Why was it important that Jesus showed himself to his disciples and gave many convincing proofs that he was alive?
- ❖ What shows that the disciples still hadn’t understood the kingdom that Jesus brought in?
- ❖ How does what Jesus says point to how his kingdom would be brought in?
- ❖ The main way in which Jesus equipped the apostles was the promise of the Holy Spirit. What would be the result of the Holy Spirit coming to them?

Read Acts 2:1-13

- ❖ What were the 3 signs that the Holy Spirit had been given to the church?
- ❖ What was significant about each?
- ❖ Luke tells us that the crowd came from all over the known world. What is significant about that?

Read Acts 2:42-47

On the Day of Pentecost the church was born.

- ❖ What were the important characteristics of the church?
- ❖ To what extent do you see those characteristics in Christ Church today?

2. Opposition begins

WORK

The first Christians devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Which of these do you find hardest? How can you encourage one another (and everyone else at Christ Church) to be devoted to these things?

WELCOME

What is the least pleasant experience you have had?

WORSHIP

Many of the psalms speak from a position of being persecuted. Use Psalm 4, or another similar Psalm, to thank the Lord for being with you when you have faced difficulties, and pray for those who tonight are in distress.

WORD

One of the things which Jesus told his disciples just before his death was to expect opposition. *“Remember what I told you: A servant is not greater than his master. If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also. If they obeyed my teaching, they will obey yours also. They will treat you in this way because of my name, for they do not know the one who sent me.”* John 15:20-21.

On the Day of Pentecost, thousands responded to Peter's preaching, and themselves became disciples. The new community was marked by generosity and care, and by the Holy Spirit doing amazing things through them. You would think that everyone would have been delighted at this – but that wasn't the case.

Read Acts 3:1-26

Luke began the book of Acts by saying that in his gospel he recorded what Jesus 'began to do and teach.' Which means that his second

book – Acts – would be about what Jesus continued to do through his apostles.

- ❖ What similarities can you see between this healing and the healings of Jesus?
- ❖ How did the crippled man respond to Peter & John?
- ❖ How did the people around respond?
- ❖ How did Peter explain what had happened?
- ❖ In his sermon, Peter gives several different titles to Jesus. How do they help to explain who Jesus is?
- ❖ What challenge did Peter give to the crowd?

Read Acts 4:1-22

- ❖ Why do you think the religious leaders were so opposed to what Peter and John did and said?
- ❖ How did Peter explain the connection between the healed cripple and salvation?
- ❖ In what different ways can you see the Holy Spirit at work in these 2 passages?

WORK

Today many Christian around the world are still persecuted because of their faith. (You can find information from www.barnabasfund.org and www.csw.org.uk.) What could you do practically to support persecuted Christians?

3. Prayer and Power

WELCOME

Are your hobbies things that you do on your own, or with other people?

WORSHIP

Psalm 133 reminds us what a blessing unity is. The Christian life was never meant to be lived alone; we all need one another to encourage and help us, and to pray with us. Praise God for times when he has blessed you through another Christian.

WORD

One of the things which Luke highlights about the early church was its commitment to prayer. In Acts 1, after Jesus' Ascension, *'They all joined together constantly in prayer'* Acts 1:14. In Acts 2, the newly formed church *'devoted themselves ... to prayer'* Acts 2:42. In Acts 3, *'Peter and John were going up to the Temple at the time of prayer'* Acts 3:1. And as the book of Acts continues, prayer will be one of the key characteristics of the early church.

Read Acts 4:23-37

- ❖ Describe the prayer of these Christians.
- ❖ The prayer begins by focussing on God. What do they say about him, and why is that important in terms of their prayer?

- ❖ What did they ask God to do?

Read Acts 5:1-11

- ❖ What do you think was so bad about what Ananias and Sapphira did?
- ❖ Do you think they deserved to be judged so severely?
- ❖ What can we learn from this?

Read Acts 6:1-7

- ❖ What was the cause of the disagreement in the church?
- ❖ How was it resolved?
- ❖ What can we learn from this about how to resolve disagreements?
- ❖ Why was it important for the apostles to concentrate on prayer and the ministry of the word?

WORK

The believers prayed for boldness in speaking of Jesus. In what situation do you need that boldness? Pray for one another about these.

4. Death & Growth

WELCOME

What do you get most enthusiastic about?

WORSHIP

Psalm 73 acknowledges that sometimes when we are following the Lord, our feet do almost slip. But it is also a reminder that we have a hope which lasts beyond this life – *my flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever*. As you use this psalm, praise God for the hope you have in him.

WORD

Just before his death Jesus said: *'Very truly I tell you, unless a grain of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds.'* John 12:24. Jesus was talking about his own death, and how that would bring life for many, but through church history Christians suffering and dying for their faith has often led to growth in the church – so much so that the early church leader Tertullian could say: *'The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church.'*

And that was true of the first Christian martyr – Stephen.

Read: Acts 6:8-15

- ❖ What does this tell you about Stephen?
- ❖ Why did 'the Synagogue of Freedmen' oppose him?

- ❖ Have you had experience of people opposing you because you have spoken about Jesus?

(Optional – Read: Acts 7:1-53)

Stephen's speech is a wonderful summary of the Old Testament, and worth reading either now or sometime later.

Read Acts 7:54-8:8

- ❖ What was the result of Stephen's martyrdom?
- ❖ What was significant about Philip going to Samaria?

Read Acts 8:9-40

- ❖ How was Simon the Sorcerer affected by the gospel?
- ❖ What did Philip teach Simon about following Jesus?

The good news had been welcomed by the Samaritans, but would the Samaritans be welcomed by the Jewish Christians? After all, there was a deep and long lasting hatred between Jews and Samaritans. All too easily a split could have appeared in the church, with Jewish Christians and Samaritan Christians keeping to themselves and ignoring each other.

So it was significant that Peter and John went to Samaria, and laid hands on them, to show the whole church, Jewish and Samaritan, that these new believers really were equal with those who had been converted in Jerusalem.

- ❖ What can we learn from this?

Straight after this, Philip, who had been at the heart of the mission to Samaria, was led away from there, and into the desert. It must

have seemed very strange to be sent away from where such great things were happening, to go and wait beside a deserted road!

- ❖ What factors were involved in the Ethiopian becoming a Christian?
- ❖ What principles of evangelism do you see in this whole passage?

WORK

It was important for the church that there was no division between Jewish and Samaritan Christians (and as we will see next time, that applied as well to Gentile Christians).

Are there other members of Christ Church that you find it difficult to get on with, and who you tend to avoid? What could you do to alter that?

5. Breaking Boundaries

WELCOME

Where would you most like to be right now?

WORSHIP

Psalm 63 gives us words to express our longing for God. Use this psalm together as a prayer that God will draw you closer to himself through this study.

WORD

Despite all the efforts made over recent decades, racism and tribalism are still worldwide problems. Whether it is ethnic Ukrainians and Russians fighting each other in Ukraine, or hostility between Shi'ite and Sunni Muslims in the Middle East, or barriers between different races in the West, it still seems to be the case that we want to stick with people like us, and stay away from people who are different.

We saw last time that that could have been an issue in the early church, when the good news was taken to Samaria. But it had even more potential for causing trouble when the good news reached complete outsiders like Romans. After all, the first Christians, who were all Jews, had been brought up to believe that Gentiles were to be avoided. No orthodox Jew would ever have entered the house of a Gentile, or invite them into his home.

Read Acts 10:1-23

- ❖ How did God prepare Peter for Cornelius?
- ❖ What would what was said in verse 15 have meant to Peter?

- ❖ How do we know that Cornelius was expecting God to work?
- ❖ What would have been the consequence if either Peter or Cornelius had not obeyed God?

Read Acts 10:24-48

- ❖ What key things does Peter tell Cornelius about Jesus?
- ❖ What part did the Holy Spirit play in Cornelius' conversion?

Following Cornelius' conversion, the believers in Jerusalem were critical of Peter for visiting the house of a Gentile, and sharing the good news with him. Peter responded by telling them all that had happened, at the end of which Luke tells us: *When they heard this, they had no further objections and praised God, saying, 'So then, even to the Gentiles God has granted repentance that leads to life.* Acts 11:18

Read Acts 11:19-30

- ❖ What good resulted from the believers being scattered after Stephen's martyrdom?
- ❖ What efforts were made to nurture the new believers at Antioch?
- ❖ What does this tell us about the importance of discipling new believers?
- ❖ As a church, how good are we at this?

Barnabas encouraged the new believers to *remain true to the Lord with all their hearts*. Acts 11:23.

- ❖ What sort of things might have stopped them from doing this?
- ❖ How about us – what might hinder you from staying true to the Lord with all your heart?
- ❖ How did the believers in Antioch show their support for the church in Jerusalem?
- ❖ What can we learn from this?

WORK

The early church put a high priority on nurturing new Christians. What can you do to encourage newer members of Christ Church to remain true to the Lord with all their heart?

6. Following the Spirit

WELCOME

What person has had the biggest influence on you?

WORSHIP

Psalm 145:9 tells us that the Lord is good to all, and has compassion on all he has made. Use the psalm together to praise God for his goodness.

WORD

Wherever you travel in the country, to villages, towns or cities, you will find beautiful church buildings. Britain wouldn't be Britain without these wonderful buildings, even if they do cost an arm and a leg to maintain and heat. Even if our politicians often try to ignore it, the whole of British culture is wrapped up in Christianity. In fact – the whole of European culture. Cathedrals and choirs. Stained glass windows. Bach's B-minor mass. The Archbishop of Canterbury, the Pope in Rome, the Orthodox patriarch in Moscow. There is something so European about Christianity. And to a lot of people Christianity is just a part of our culture.

So it can come as a bit of a shock to realise, or to be reminded, that Christianity was originally a non-European religion, that was brought by missionaries **to** Europe. And that is what we see happening when the apostle Paul first crossed over from Turkey into Greece.

Read Acts 16:6-15

- ❖ How do you see the Holy Spirit at work here?
- ❖ Can you learn anything from this about how the Holy Spirit might guide us today?
- ❖ What part did Paul play in Lydia's conversion?
- ❖ And what part did the Holy Spirit play?
- ❖ Paul went to where he knew there would be people ready to listen to what he had to say. (He went to where these women had gone to pray.) Where might we go in order to find people who are open to the good news?

Read Acts 16:16-40

- ❖ Why did opposition to Paul and Silas arise?
- ❖ How did Paul and Silas respond to being flogged and thrown into prison?
- ❖ How do you think would this have affected the other prisoners?
- ❖ Why do you think the jailer asked 'what must I do to be saved'?

So – the first 3 converts in Europe seem to have been a rich business woman, a slave girl, and a prison guard (probably a retired soldier). How does this demonstrate the unifying power of the gospel? How can we make sure that Christ Church is a place of welcome for such a wide range of people?

Read Acts 17:1-15

- ❖ How did the Thessalonians respond to the good news?
- ❖ How about the Bereans?

Paul and Silas were driven out of Thessalonica, but the work they had started continued. 1 Thessalonians 1:1-10 shows how the church there grew and became an example to others.

Read Acts 17:16-34

- ❖ What caught Paul's attention in Athens?
- ❖ What idols do people in our community worship?
- ❖ What did Paul tell the people of Athens about God?

Most of the sermons we have recorded in Acts were spoken to people with a Jewish background, and so use Old Testament imagery. But in Athens, Paul's hearers would not have had that background, and so Paul used a different approach with them.

- ❖ What does that tell us about how we should go about talking to others about Jesus?

WORK

In 1 Peter we are told: *Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect.* 1 Peter 3:15.

Tell the others in your group why it is that you are a Christian (if you can't explain that to your friends, you will never say it to anyone else!)

7. To the ends of the earth

WELCOME

This is our last home group until the autumn. If you could do anything you want, what one thing would you like to do this summer?

WORSHIP

Psalms 113:3 says: *From the rising of the sun to the place where it sets, the name of the Lord is to be praised.* Praise him for his goodness to you, and ask that the Holy Spirit will help you to praise him wherever you go.

WORD

When the Apostle Paul wrote to the church in Philippi, he said: *being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.* Philippians 1:6.

What God starts, he finishes. And the book of Acts has shown us that. Before his Ascension Jesus told the disciples that they would be his witnesses *'in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.'* Acts 1:8. And as we have followed the book of Acts, we have seen that happen. Often the way in which God fulfilled his purpose was not what anyone would have expected: it was persecution in Jerusalem which drove Christians out and into the rest of Judea and Samaria. It was an encounter for Philip with an Ethiopian official which led to the good news being taken to Ethiopia. It was the Lord preventing Paul from preaching in Bithynia (in modern Turkey) that led to Paul and Silas going instead to

Philippi, and preaching the good news in Europe. And it was persecution in Jerusalem that led to Paul eventually travelling to Rome.

Often God's ways seem strange; sometimes he does lead his people into problems rather than away from them, but through it all we can trust him to be working out his good purposes.

Read Acts 21:17-26

- ❖ After 4 great missionary journeys, Paul returned to Jerusalem.
- ❖ What tensions were there between the Christians in Jerusalem and Paul?
- ❖ How did they resolve them?
- ❖ Is there anything we can learn from them about resolving differences we might have with other Christians?

Read Acts 21:27-36

- ❖ What accusations were made against Paul by the crowd?
- ❖ How were these accusations wrong?

(Optional – Read Acts 21:37-22:21)

Paul tells the crowd about his experience of Jesus, but they are not willing to listen to what he says.

Read Acts 22:22-23:11

- ❖ When he heard Paul's defence, Ananias ordered Paul to be struck in the mouth. What had Paul claimed that had so enraged Ananias (23:1)?

- ❖ Could you make the same claim as Paul?
- ❖ What effect do you think the Lord's appearance and message would have had on Paul?
- ❖ How is Paul a good model for us when we are attacked because we speak about Jesus?

In Acts 24, 25 & 26 Paul defends himself before Felix, the Roman governor, then 2 years later before Felix's successor Festus, and the before King Agrippa (great grandson of Herod who had been king when Jesus was born). At the end of this, Agrippa saw no reason why Paul should not be freed. But Paul had already appealed to Rome, and so he had to go there.

Read Acts 28:17-3

The Lord had promised Paul that he would testify about him in Rome, and although the route there was long and difficult (at least 2 years in prison, followed by storm at sea and shipwreck, and being bitten by a viper, finally Paul arrived in Rome.

- ❖ How does the end of Acts show the fulfilment of the promise Jesus made in Acts 1:8?
- ❖ How could this passage encourage a Christian who is going through a difficult time?

WORK

Our home group series on Acts has finished. As we begin our summer break, what are the 3 most important things you have learned from this series?

And what can you do to help one another to remain true to the Lord with all your heart?

CHRIST CHURCH, MORETON

We want to be a **W**elcoming Church

Because Jesus welcomed all who came to him.

an **E**vangelling Church

Because we believe that everyone has the right to hear the Good News of Jesus

a **L**oving Church

Because Jesus commanded his followers to love one another

a **L**earning Church

Because we are in the business of making disciples, and disciples must always be learners.