

Acts 1:1-11

If you want to know how and why Jesus' life has had the impact it has, you've got to start with the book of Acts. It's an incredible story: the story of how the message of God's love and grace has flooded out into the world. And it's a story that everyone of us is invited to participate in

The Work Goes On

In his introduction Luke tells us that this is his second book. But he does not see his gospel as one story, and Acts as another: it is all one story. The gospel told us what Jesus began to do and teach, Acts what he continues to do and teach. So when we see and hear things happening in Acts, Luke wants us to know that it's Jesus who's doing them.

And that should tell us that the way Jesus continues to work in the world is through his people, his church: which means you and me.

But also, this book was written to a man who represents many of us: either he was a Christian wanting to grow, or he was wobbling in his faith, or he was investigating the faith. His name, Theophilus, means 'One Loved by God'. And as those loved by God, this book is written as much for us as for him.

And the first thing Luke wants us to understand is that Christianity is built on rock-solid facts.

Persuaded by Truth

Luke has done his research. He has interviewed the eyewitnesses. Like all of us, they needed proof that Jesus really had risen from the dead and they got that proof. They saw proof enough that turned their lives upside down, and the world with them. So one of the major reasons the Christian faith spread as it did, was the fact of the resurrection.

The first apostles were so convinced of this that they gave their lives to spread the message. Those proofs were not just for the apostles, but for Theophilus and for us. We too can risk our lives on Christ. Yet despite having the facts, and the proof they needed, they still needed the Holy Spirit.

Empowered by the Spirit

Jesus told them they were not to leave Jerusalem until they had received the Holy Spirit. They weren't to start the mission before they were equipped for it. There are two dangers there for us: one is that we think it doesn't apply to us, and we think we can carry on in our own strength; the other is that we think we have to wait, when we live this side of Pentecost, and already have the Spirit. Rather, we are to go on being filled by the Spirit.

But empowered for what? To be a witness to what Jesus has done for us. The Spirit is like an unseen spotlight, magnifying Jesus.

Staying on Message

But before the mission begins, the apostles needed two gentle rebukes: they were thinking earthly kingdoms, and they stood looking into the sky. But Jesus' agenda is much bigger than our little patch, and rather than worry about the end of time, he sends us to the ends of the world.