

May 10, 2020

Acts 18:1-4

New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)

The Book of Acts or the Acts of the Apostles is

believed to have been written by the same author as the gospel of Luke: presumably Luke – a disciples who traveled and worked with the apostle Paul. The book tells the story of the emerging Church as those who followed Jesus during his life and after his absence become known as the “people of the Way.” Their story moves from Jerusalem and Israel/Palestine to encompass the Roman Empire, following the missionary travels of the apostle Paul. It tells of how the emerging Church moves from a Jewish-focus to a Universal religion that welcomes all peoples (Gentiles or Greeks – the language used by Jews of the 1st century for everyone who wasn’t Jewish). This story moves from these early years and from the margins of the Empire to the capital and on to include our lives and actions, as we the Church of today, continue the story.

Corinth was becoming the largest, most prosperous city in Greece by the time Paul arrives. It was the chief economic and cultural crossroads between the western and eastern portions of the Mediterranean: a place of great exchange in terms of money, culture, ideas, and people. It was a city of great pluralism in terms of race, ethnicity, religion, and culture – which we see in the story of how Paul works with Jews and Greeks and also in the pastoral advice given by Paul in 1 Corinthians to specifics problems the church faces.

CLAUDIUS HAD ORDERED ALL JEWS TO LEAVE ROME in 41 the emperor Claudius (still emperor at the time of the story in Acts 18) made some sort of decree about the Jewish presence and right to public worship in both Alexandria (the major intellectual city of the Empire in what we now call Egypt) and in Rome. Aquila & Priscilla seem to thus be Jewish refugees who have fled Rome for Corinth.

THEY WORKED TOGETHER The three tentmakers work together, which was a way to identify with the lower-caste peoples, who did manual labor, and were looked down upon by upper-class Greeks. It also was a way to earn their keep, unlike other religious and philosopher teachers (like the Sophists) who traveled and taught and demanded that their students pay them for their teaching – and were often seen as itinerant hucksters.

he shook the dust from his clothes This expression and action are akin to our modern expression of “washing your hands” of involvement in something. We see it repeatedly used in the Bible, even by Jesus in Matthew 10:14 “If anyone will not welcome you or listen to your words, shake off the dust from your feet as you leave that house or town.”

¹ After this Paul left Athens and went to **Corinth**.

² There he found a Jew named Aquila, a native of Pontus, who had recently come from Italy with his wife Priscilla, because **CLAUDIUS HAD ORDERED ALL JEWS TO LEAVE ROME**. Paul went to see them, ³ and, because he was of the same trade, he stayed with them, and **THEY WORKED TOGETHER**—by trade they were tentmakers. ⁴ Every sabbath he would argue in the synagogue and would try to convince Jews and Greeks.

⁵ When Silas and Timothy arrived from Macedonia, Paul was occupied with proclaiming the word, testifying to the Jews that the Messiah was Jesus. ⁶ When they opposed and reviled him, in protest he shook the dust from his clothes and said to them, “Your blood be on your own heads! I am innocent. From now on I will go to the Gentiles.” ⁷ Then he left the synagogue and went to the house of a man named Titius Justus, a worshiper of God; his house was next door to the synagogue. ⁸ Crispus, the official of the synagogue, became a believer in the Lord, together with all his household; and many of the Corinthians who heard Paul became believers and were baptized. ⁹ One night the Lord said to Paul in a vision, “Do not be afraid, but speak and do not be silent; ¹⁰ for I am with you, and no one will lay a hand on you to harm you, for there are many in this city who are my people.” ¹¹ He stayed there a year and six months, teaching the word of God among them.

¹² But when Gallio was proconsul of Achaia, the Jews made a united attack on Paul and brought him before the tribunal. ¹³ They said, “This man is persuading people to worship God in ways that are contrary to the law.” ¹⁴ Just as Paul was about to speak, Gallio said to the Jews, “If it were a matter of crime or serious villainy, I would be justified in accepting the complaint of you Jews; ¹⁵ but since it is a matter of questions about words and names and your own law, see to it yourselves; I do not wish to be a judge of these matters.” ¹⁶ And he dismissed them from the tribunal. ¹⁷ Then all of

them seized Sosthenes, the official of the synagogue, and beat him in front of the tribunal. But Gallio paid no attention to any of these things.

1 Corinthians 1:10-18

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¹⁰ Now I appeal to you, brothers and sisters, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you be in agreement and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and the same purpose.

¹¹ For it has been reported to me by Chloe's people that there are quarrels among you, my brothers and sisters.

¹² What I mean is that each of you says, "I belong to Paul," or "I belong to Apollos," or "I belong to Cephas," or "I belong to Christ." ¹³ Has Christ been divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul? ¹⁴ I thank God that I baptized none of you except Crispus and Gaius, ¹⁵ so that no one can say that you were baptized in my name. ¹⁶ (I did baptize also the household of Stephanas; beyond that, I do not know whether I baptized anyone else.)

¹⁷ For Christ did not send me to baptize but to proclaim the gospel, and not with eloquent *wisdom*, so that the cross of Christ might not be **EMPTIED** of its power.

¹⁸ For the message about the cross is **FOOLISHNESS** to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the **power** of God. ¹⁹ For it is written,

"I will destroy the wisdom of the wise,
and the discernment of the discerning I will thwart."

²⁰ Where is the one who is wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? ²¹ For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, God decided, through the foolishness of our proclamation, to save those who believe. ²² For Jews demand signs and Greeks desire wisdom, ²³ but we proclaim Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, ²⁴ but to those who are the called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. ²⁵ For God's foolishness is wiser than human wisdom, and God's weakness is stronger than human strength.

The Book of Corinthians is believed to have been written by the Apostle Paul, probably during his stay in Ephesus, (53–57 ce) after his initial 18 month sojourn in Corinth (around 50 ce). Paul seems to have written this letter of pastoral advice after he received disconcerting news of the community in Corinth regarding jealousies, rivalry, and immoral behavior.

From the body of the letter it also appears that the Corinthian congregation was also asking for clarification on a number of matters, such as marriage and the consumption of meat previously offered to pagan idols. The letter is perhaps best known for the metaphor of the Church as the body of Christ (12) and the chapter of Love (13). We read the beginning section of the letter, following the salutations and greetings, which includes an introductory summary of Paul's main theological point: following Jesus is a different way of living than what the world offers.

I belong - This expression points to statements of spiritual superiority that congregants seem to be making based on the spiritual authority of the person who baptized them (or welcomed them into the faith).

Cephas - This is the Greek form of the name Peter.

wisdom σοφία [sophia] -- wisdom or clarity. It's the root of the English terms, "sophistication" and "philosophy" – literally (respectively), "the art of using wisdom," "affection for wisdom." Sophia was associated with the gods or divine. The Greeks held that philosophy was the most pure way to talk of Sophia (wisdom). So you might say that it would be more associated with eloquent rhetoric in a speech than with impassioned street preaching.

EMPTIED κενόω [kenōō] to empty out, to make void i. e. deprive of force, render vain, useless, of no effect, hollow, false. It's the same verb used in Philippians 2:7 to talk about the unique mission of Jesus:
"⁵ Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus,

⁶ who, though he was in the form of God,
did not regard equality with God
as something to be exploited,
⁷ but **EMPTIED HIMSELF**,
taking the form of a slave,
being born in human likeness."

FOOLISHNESS - μωρία, [moria] – something that is folly; literally, dull (lacking sharpness).

those who are perishing - explanation

QUESTIONS FOR THE PRACTICE OF EXAMEN &
CONTEMPLATION

- What part of today's texts grab you?
- How does Paul demonstrate his wisdom and/or foolishness in Acts 18?
- The book of Acts is very brief in describing what happens in the 18 months Paul is in Corinth. Yet the pastoral letter is long, filled with details and questions related to his leadership and the big impact he had on the city and church there. What is Paul saying when he talks about foolishness of this age and the wisdom of God?
- How is Christ crucified foolish? How is choosing to follow Jesus possibly seen as foolish in the world today? How is that correct? ; wrong?
- In the pandemic we all make choices based upon wisdom, what we deem to be wise, pure or true. How is your faith in Jesus - as the power of God in the world - shaping your actions in response to the fear of reopening life too soon? To the fear of the collapsing economy? To the fear of contagion? To the fear of death? To the possibility that the voice of the strong, politically connected and rich will trump the needs of the poor, marginalized, sick and weak?
- How do you hear the the Spirit of God inviting you to act, speak or be in your relationships through this word?

those who are perishing - ἀπόλλυμι [apollumi] - those whose death is certain, those who are cut away from, destroyed, removed... to be lost from what was intended at the origin, or by choice (such as in choosing to trust and follow Jesus).

Verse 19 is a quote from Isaiah 29:14, a splicing together of the Greek translation of this section in which the prophet tells of how the sin of the people makes them blind to what God is doing in the world. It teases that the sinfulness of humankind is related to their arrogance and pride, thinking that they (the creatures) are greater than God (the creator).

¹³ The Lord said:

Because these people draw near with their mouths
and honor me with their lips,
while their hearts are far from me,
and their worship of me is a human commandment
learned by rote;

¹⁴ so I will again do

amazing things with this people,
shocking and amazing.

*The wisdom of their wise shall perish,
and the discernment of the discerning shall be
hidden.*

¹⁵ Ha! You who hide a plan too deep for the Lord,
whose deeds are in the dark,
and who say, "Who sees us? Who knows us?"

¹⁶ You turn things upside down!

Shall the potter be regarded as the clay?

Shall the thing made say of its maker,

"He did not make me";

or the thing formed say of the one who formed it,
"He has no understanding"?