

April 19, 2020

Acts 1:1-14

New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)

¹ In the first book, **Theophilus**, I wrote about all that Jesus did and taught from the beginning ² until the day when he was taken up to heaven, after giving instructions through the Holy Spirit to the apostles whom he had chosen. ³ 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**. ⁴ 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; ⁵ for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now."

⁶ So when they had come together, they asked him, "Lord, is this the time when you will **RESTORE THE KINGDOM TO ISRAEL**?" ⁷ He replied, "It is not for you to know the times or periods that the Father has set by his own authority. ⁸ But you will

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 disciple who traveled and worked with the apostle Paul. For many years we've thought of Acts as the sequel to Luke's gospel, but recent scholarship sees it more as the second half of the gospel. This is important as it switches the resurrection of Jesus from the climax of the story to the middle point, with the end of the story being incomplete, written by the way that we – as the Church today – continue the story.

Acts tells the unfolding story of the beginning of the church, moving from the disciples following the resurrection, to the emergence of the church in Jerusalem around the Temple and then as it spread outwards towards the ends of the world of the Roman Empire. It begins with Peter and the other apostles, before switching to focus upon the work of Paul as he witnessed to the good news gospel of Jesus of Nazareth among the Gentile (or non-Jewish) peoples of the Roman Empire. While it does tell the story of the beginning of the Church – it focuses on the church that emerged from the ministry of Paul as opposed to the other branches of Christianity that emerged in Israel, Egypt, in the middle East and even all the way to India. Paul's version of Christianity, testified to in the Epistles (or letters to the ancient churches) has become the dominant form of Christianity.

In the first book, **Theophilus**: The book points back to the prologue of Luke, which was also dedicated to **Theophilus** a name which was commonly used (an ancient form of our modern Timothy) and which also meant one who loved (*philus*) God (*theo*-). Scholars are unsure if this means it's addressed to a specific person or to all those who are "Friends of God" or in other words "Followers of Jesus." The gospel begins with a similarly worded prologue "¹Since many have undertaken to set down an orderly account of the events that have been fulfilled among us, ² just as they were handed on to us by those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and servants of the word, ³ I too decided, after investigating everything carefully from the very first, to write an orderly account for you, most excellent **Theophilus**, ⁴ so that you may know the truth concerning the things about which you have been instructed." Luke 1:1-4

FORTY DAYS – numbers are important in the biblical stories, and often repetitive as they evoke particular symbolism. The number 40 is associated with the days that Noah spent on the Ark during the flood (Genesis 7:4); Spies were sent by Moses to explore the land of Canaan (promised to the children of Israel) for "forty days" (Numbers 13:2, 25). The number of years it took for the Hebrew people to get to the promised land, the number of years represented in the time it takes for a new generation to arise (Numbers 32:13). and the period of days of Jesus' fast and temptation (Luke 4:1-2). 40 thus represents a period of preparation, trial, study or development.

the promise of the Father – this points back to the words of Jesus after his resurrection in Luke 24:48-49 "48 You are witnesses of these things. 49 And see, I am sending upon you what my Father promised;...

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.”⁹ When he had said this, as they were watching, he was lifted up, and *a cloud* took him out of their sight.¹⁰ While he was going and they were gazing up toward heaven, suddenly two men in white robes stood by them.¹¹ 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.”

¹² Then they returned to Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is near Jerusalem, a sabbath day’s journey away.¹³ 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.¹⁴ All these were constantly devoting themselves to prayer, together with certain women, including Mary the mother of Jesus, as well as his brothers.

QUESTIONS FOR THE PRACTICE OF EXAMEN & CONTEMPLATION

- What part of today’s story grabs your attention?
- How do you understand yourself as a Friend of God (Theophilus)? How does hearing the story of the life, mission, and teaching of Jesus nourish you in that friendship? How might the story of the emergence of the Church do that?
- What does the word witness mean for you?
- How have you understood yourself to be a witness to the life, mission and teaching of Jesus in your life?
- How do you understand that (in the same way or maybe differently) in this season of COVID-19? Why?
- What invitation to walk, act, speak, or relate to others do you hear in the text today?

so stay here in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high.”

for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit: This points back to the exact words of John the Baptizer in Luke 3:15-16 “¹⁵ As the people were filled with expectation, and all were questioning in their hearts concerning John, whether he might be the Messiah, ¹⁶ John answered all of them by saying, “I baptize you with water; but one who is more powerful than I is coming; I am not worthy to untie the thong of his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.”

RESTORE THE KINGDOM TO ISRAEL We see that the disciples still are looking for the restoration of Israel, of what used to be (what they imagine the Messiah will do) as opposed to what Jesus is bringing into being that he calls the **KINGDOM OF GOD**.

witnesses : μάρτυς pronounced [martus] – or martyr. 1) in a legal sense it means someone who has been a witness or can bear witness, having seen or heard or experienced something, or that he knows it because taught by divine revelation or inspiration

2) in an historical sense it means anyone who is a spectator of anything

3) in an ethical sense those are called witnesses to/of Jesus have who after have proved the strength and genuineness of their faith in Christ by undergoing a violent death