

ACTS 3-5

In this section we witness the ministry of the apostles led by Peter, the life of the community, and the reaction of the authorities. Consider 7 recurring themes.

1) The apostles led by Peter have the power to heal as Jesus did. But their healing power only derives through Jesus. They heal in his name. His Spirit is their source of energy, confidence, encouragement and hope. They are his hands, feet, voice and heart, powered by his Spirit flowing in and through them.

2) Their confidence is manifested in a boldness in speaking which astonishes even the religious leaders who are at a loss as to how to deal with them and stop them. The resurrection of Jesus and the anticipation of resurrection for all who follow Jesus, also gives them some clarity as to how the fulfilment of God's promises and the hopes of Israel have been met and are being met through the life, death, resurrection, ascension/exaltation of Jesus and his eventual coming again to restore all things to God. When Jesus returns justice will be established, the innocent righteous vindicated and the wicked held accountable. In the present time, people are called to repentance so that they may experience 'refreshment' in the present and hope for the future (3:20). Regardless of whether such a future can be proved, Jesus' followers live with strong faith in the present times.

3) This teaching is proclaimed publicly and also shared in the fellowship of the community under the apostles whose key spokesman and leader is Peter.

4) The authorities are chiefly the Sadducees and High Priests who are concerned about the apostles' popularity as well as their teaching about Jesus' resurrection from the dead. The Pharisees (represented by Gamaliel in the Sanhedrin (Chap.5)) are more sympathetic to the Christians since they, too, believe in the general resurrection of the dead. The Pharisees were more popular among the people and led the Synagogues, although some Pharisees/Scribes were also working for the High Priestly leaders.

5) In the community's fellowship, the presence of the Holy Spirit (Spirit of the risen Christ) is evident in the earthquake-like shaking of the room where they gather, and their vibrant enthusiasm and confidence of spirit.

6) The quality of the community's fellowship is also evident in the spontaneous and free sharing of their possessions. No one tells Barnabas to sell his field and give the proceeds for the needs of the church. But he does so and holds nothing back. No one tells Ananias and Sapphira to try to emulate Barnabas, but they want to do so in order to be received in the same way. The problem with their actions, however, is not that they don't give it all up, but that they claim to give it all up. Their lying manifests a dishonesty of spirit and insincerity of heart. The fellowship cannot countenance such dishonesty for it will destroy the trust that is essential for loving fellowship and support to work in a social context where there is persecution and betrayal all around them. Being truthful and honest is more important than giving up all your money. Without trust there can be no intimacy of fellowship.

7) The suffering of the apostles and other believers at the hands of the authorities only makes them feel closer to Christ and his sufferings. They also know that their destiny is to be resurrected and they are already tasting some of the fruits of that hope in the power of the Holy Spirit manifested in their spirits. They are full of love, trust, confidence, joy and peace, even though they suffer opposition, threat and persecution. This is all the fruit of a spiritual resurrection as the "first-installment" (Romans 5:5, 2 Corinthians 5:5) of a fuller Spirit transformation/resurrection to come after death or at the second coming, whichever comes first. We begin to experience a spiritual resurrection now in anticipation of a full person (body/spirit) resurrection to come after death.

Luke wants to show the heart and soul of the early community and its leadership in its most idealist sense because it doesn't take long for conflict to erupt and challenge the unity, openness and trust of the church among its members.