



INTRO & CHAPTER ONE

Embracing the Story

LUKE 24:48
ACTS 1:1-11

Introduction & Chapter 1: Embracing the Story

Luke 24:48 (NRSVue)

⁴⁸ You are witnesses of these things.

Acts 1:1-11 (NRSVue)

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

⁶So when they had come together, they asked him, “Lord, is this the time when you will restore the kingdom to Israel?” ⁷He replied, “It is not for you to know the times or periods that the Father has set by his own authority. ⁸But you will 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.” ⁹When he had said this, as they were watching, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight. ¹⁰While he was going and they were gazing up toward heaven, suddenly two men in white robes stood by them. ¹¹They 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.”

Discussion Questions from the Biblical Text:

1. Jesus tells the disciples they will be his witnesses. This is not something to do, but someone to be. What does it mean to be a witness?
2. Look at a map of New Testament locations (in your Bible or online). Find Jerusalem, which is a city in Judea. Find Samaria, a territory north of Judea. Jesus begins where they are (Jerusalem), and expands the scope of the area to which they are meant to witness. How would you rephrase Jesus’ words for your present geographical location?
3. What do you notice in this story? What wonderings are stirred for you?

Discussion Questions from *Bearing Witness in Acts and Today* by Troy M. Troftgruben:

1. What images come to mind as you hear the word “evangelism”? (page xxvi)
2. In your experience, what are the greatest obstacles for Christians engaging in faithful witness today? (page xxvi)
3. How do you discern the presence of God in your life? (page 13)

Discussion Questions from *Opening Space: A vision for Fresh Expressions of Church and Creative Mission* by Shannon Kiser:

1. Rev. Kiser wonders “what would break loose if our Sunday morning crowd became amazed at Jesus once again” (page 3). When have you been amazed by Jesus?



CHAPTER TWO

Telling the Story

ACTS 2:1-41

Chapter 2: Telling the Story

Acts 2:1-12, 38-41 (NRSVue)

¹When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. ²And suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. ³Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them. ⁴All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability. ⁵Now there were devout Jews from every people under heaven living in Jerusalem. ⁶And at this sound the crowd gathered and was bewildered, because each one heard them speaking in the native language of each. ⁷Amazed and astonished, they asked, “Are not all these who are speaking Galileans? ⁸And how is it that we hear, each of us, in our own native language? ⁹Parthians, Medes, Elamites, and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, ¹⁰Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, ¹¹Cretans and Arabs—in our own languages we hear them speaking about God’s deeds of power.” ¹²All were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, “What does this mean?”

³⁸Peter said to them, “Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ so that your sins may be forgiven, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. ³⁹For the promise is for you, for your children, and for all who are far away, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to him.” ⁴⁰And he testified with many other arguments and exhorted them, saying, “Save yourselves from this corrupt generation.” ⁴¹So those who welcomed his message were baptized, and that day about three thousand persons were added.

Discussion Questions from the Biblical Text:

1. In this story the crowd is astonished at hearing all of their languages. When have you heard other languages spoken in a public setting? What was that experience like?
2. How many different places are referenced in this story? What does this say about the work of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost?
3. What do you notice in this story? What wonderings are stirred for you?

Discussion Questions from *Bearing Witness in Acts and Today* by Troy M. Troftgruben:

1. Consider experiences you—or others—have had in trying to learn a new language. Now consider what the Spirit did at Pentecost. What does this suggest about the things God calls us to do today? (page 33)
2. What are your greatest fears or concerns with talking about your faith with others? What would help you feel more interested or excited about it? (page 33)

Discussion Questions from *Opening Space: A vision for Fresh Expressions of Church and Creative Mission* by Shannon Kiser:

1. Fresh Expressions seek to build new Christian communities in spaces of everyday life. This is an invitation to “risk, in the way of an incarnational God, to enter into the lives of people right where they are” (page 13). Examples include a dinner church that meets in a restaurant, a Christian gathering that unfolds in a running group, or a group that meets in a tattoo parlor. What places and gatherings of people do visit outside of home and church?



CHAPTER THREE

Embodying the Story

ACTS 2:42-47
ACTS 4:32-37

Chapter 3: Embodying the Story

Acts 2:42-42; 4:32-37 (NRSVue)

⁴² They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.

⁴³ Awe came upon everyone because many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles. ⁴⁴ All who believed were together and had all things in common; ⁴⁵ they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need. ⁴⁶ Day by day, as they spent much time together in the temple, they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts, ⁴⁷ praising God and having the goodwill of all the people. And day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved.

³² Now the whole group of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one claimed private ownership of any possessions, but everything they owned was held in common.

³³ With great power the apostles gave their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all. ³⁴ There was not a needy person among them, for as many as owned lands or houses sold them and brought the proceeds of what was sold. ³⁵ They laid it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to each as any had need. ³⁶ There was a Levite from Cyprus, Joseph, to whom the apostles gave the name Barnabas (which means "son of encouragement"). ³⁷ He sold a field that belonged to him, then brought the money and laid it at the apostles' feet.

Discussion Questions from the Biblical Text:

1. In this story we find the early church sharing in spiritual practices. How have the shared rituals and practice of the church been important to your faith?
2. This story also tells of the early church sharing economics? How does that part of the narrative sit with you?
3. What do you notice in this story? What wonderings are stirred for you?

Discussion Questions from *Bearing Witness in Acts and Today* by Troy M. Troftgruben:

1. Who in your life has embodied the message of Jesus for you, not necessarily in words? What do you learn from their witness? (page 50)
2. If someone were to ask random people in your larger community about your church, what do you think people would say? What do you hope people would say? (page 50)

Discussion Questions from *Opening Space: A vision for Fresh Expressions of Church and Creative Mission* by Shannon Kiser:

1. Fresh Expressions are centered on a loving-first approach. It begins with listening and relating to people, loving and serving them, "which helps them discover ways to build community and explore discipleship" (page 44). How have you embodying listening and relating to people in your neighborhood? Loving and serving those in your community?



CHAPTER FOUR

Making the Story Public

ACTS 4:7-22

Chapter 4: Making the Story Public

Acts 4:7-22 (NRSVue)

⁷When they had made the prisoners stand in their midst, they inquired, “By what power or by what name did you do this?” ⁸Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them, “Rulers of the people and elders, ⁹if we are being questioned today because of a good deed done to someone who was sick and are being asked how this man has been healed, ¹⁰let it be known to all of you, and to all the people of Israel, that this man is standing before you in good health by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead. ¹¹This Jesus is ‘the stone that was rejected by you, the builders; it has become the cornerstone.’ ¹²“There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among mortals by which we must be saved.”

¹³Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John and realized that they were uneducated and ordinary men, they were amazed and recognized them as companions of Jesus. ¹⁴When they saw the man who had been cured standing beside them, they had nothing to say in opposition. ¹⁵So they ordered them to leave the council while they discussed the matter with one another. ¹⁶They said, “What will we do with them? For it is obvious to all who live in Jerusalem that a notable sign has been done through them; we cannot deny it. ¹⁷But to keep it from spreading further among the people, let us warn them to speak no more to anyone in this name.” ¹⁸So they called them and ordered them not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus. ¹⁹But Peter and John answered them, “Whether it is right in God’s sight to listen to you rather than to God, you must judge; ²⁰for we cannot keep from speaking about what we have seen and heard.” ²¹After threatening them again, they let them go, finding no way to punish them because of the people, for all of them praised God for what had happened. ²²For the man on whom this sign of healing had been performed was more than forty years old.

Discussion Questions from the Biblical Text:

1. Based on this story, how do you think Peter and the other disciples understand their mission?
2. Imagine being hauled before your local city council to account for your faith? How do you think you would feel?
3. What do you notice in this story? What wonderings are stirred for you?

Discussion Questions from *Bearing Witness in Acts and Today* by Troy M. Troftgruben:

1. When you think about Christian witness in the public sphere, what positive and negative examples come to your mind? What impressions of God are conveyed by these examples? What is to be learned? (page 71)
2. Imagine your church building (if it has one) suddenly burned down, forcing your community to gather for a year or more in a rented public space somewhere in the heart of your local community. What would change? (page 71)

Discussion Questions from *Opening Space: A vision for Fresh Expressions of Church and Creative Mission* by Shannon Kiser:

1. Fresh Expressions emerge around people, places, and passions (pages 45-46). Where are people already gathering in your community?



CHAPTER FIVE

Conversing about the Story

ACTS 8:26-40

Chapter 5: Conversing about the Story

Acts 8:26-40 (NRSVue)

²⁶ Then an angel of the Lord said to Philip, “Get up and go toward the south to the road that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza.” (This is a wilderness road.) ²⁷ So he got up and went. Now there was an Ethiopian eunuch, a court official of the Candace, the queen of the Ethiopians, in charge of her entire treasury. He had come to Jerusalem to worship ²⁸ and was returning home; seated in his chariot, he was reading the prophet Isaiah. ²⁹ Then the Spirit said to Philip, “Go over to this chariot and join it.” ³⁰ So Philip ran up to it and heard him reading the prophet Isaiah. He asked, “Do you understand what you are reading?” ³¹ He replied, “How can I, unless someone guides me?” And he invited Philip to get in and sit beside him. ³² Now the passage of the scripture that he was reading was this: “Like a sheep he was led to the slaughter, and like a lamb silent before its shearer, so he does not open his mouth. ³³ In his humiliation justice was denied him. Who can describe his generation? For his life is taken away from the earth.”

³⁴ The eunuch asked Philip, “About whom, may I ask you, does the prophet say this, about himself or about someone else?”

³⁵ Then Philip began to speak, and starting with this scripture he proclaimed to him the good news about Jesus. ³⁶ As they were going along the road, they came to some water, and the eunuch said, “Look, here is water! What is to prevent me from being baptized?” ³⁸ He commanded the chariot to stop, and both of them, Philip and the eunuch, went down into the water, and Philip baptized him. ³⁹ When they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord snatched Philip away; the eunuch saw him no more and went on his way rejoicing. ⁴⁰ But Philip found himself at Azotus, and as he was passing through the region he proclaimed the good news to all the towns until he came to Caesarea.

Discussion Questions from the Biblical Text:

1. Philip gets step-by-step directions from an angel, with no certainty of what is to come. How have you discerned that guidance of the Spirit? Was it that easy?
2. How does Philip shape his conversation with the Ethiopian?
3. What do you notice in this story? What wonderings are stirred for you?

Discussion Questions from *Bearing Witness in Acts and Today* by Troy M. Troftgruben:

1. Think about some of the best conversations you have had with people about God, faith, and things of lasting significance. What traits characterize those conversations? What makes them so memorable and beneficial? (page 90)
2. This chapter frames bearing witness through conversation in general and listening in particular. What is your reaction to thinking about faithful witness in the context of conversations with other? (page 90)

Discussion Questions from *Opening Space: A vision for Fresh Expressions of Church and Creative Mission* by Shannon Kiser:

1. Fresh Expressions begin with listening (pages 44-47). How have you already been listening in your community? How might you engage in more listening? (page 59)



CHAPTER SIX

Taking the Story to New Places

ACTS 10:1-11:18

Chapter 6: Taking the Story to New Places

Acts 10:25-28, 34-41, 44-48 (NRSVue)

²⁵On Peter's arrival, Cornelius met him and, falling at his feet, worshiped him. ²⁶But Peter made him get up, saying, "Stand up; I am only a mortal." ²⁷And as he talked with him, he went in and found that many had assembled, ²⁸and he said to them, "You yourselves know that it is improper for a Jew to associate with or to visit an outsider, but God has shown me that I should not call anyone profane or unclean.

³⁴Then Peter began to speak to them: "I truly understand that God shows no partiality, ³⁵but in every people anyone who fears him and practices righteousness is acceptable to him. ³⁶You know the message he sent to the people of Israel, preaching peace by Jesus Christ—he is Lord of all. ³⁷That message spread throughout Judea, beginning in Galilee after the baptism that John announced: ³⁸how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power; how he went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with him. ³⁹We are witnesses to all that he did both in Judea and in Jerusalem. They put him to death by hanging him on a tree, ⁴⁰but God raised him on the third day and allowed him to appear, ⁴¹not to all the people but to us who were chosen by God as witnesses and who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead.

⁴⁴While Peter was still speaking, the Holy Spirit fell upon all who heard the word. ⁴⁵The circumcised believers who had come with Peter were astounded that the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out even on the gentiles, ⁴⁶for they heard them speaking in tongues and extolling God. Then Peter said, ⁴⁷"Can anyone withhold the water for baptizing these people who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?" ⁴⁸So he ordered them to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. Then they invited him to stay for several days.

Discussion Questions from the Biblical Text:

1. A Roman centurion stood by as Jesus was crucified. How do you think Peter felt as he entered the house of Cornelius who also was a centurion?
2. Peter acknowledges the difficulty of the situation. How might this be a model for engaging in awkward conversations about faith?
3. What do you notice in this story? What wonderings are stirred for you?

Discussion Questions from *Bearing Witness in Acts and Today* by Troy M. Troftgruben:

1. This chapter suggests the story of acts is not simply about the conversion of the nations but also about the conversion (or change in thinking) of the church. What do you think about that idea? (page 112)
2. What concrete examples come to your mind of situations where church communities have faithfully (or not so faithfully) navigated traditional barriers to welcoming people? (page 113)

Discussion Questions from *Opening Space: A vision for Fresh Expressions of Church and Creative Mission* by Shannon Kiser:

1. Fresh Expressions emerge around people, places, and passions (pages 45-46). Is there a people, place, or passion that has come to mind for you as you think about the possibility of fresh expressions in your setting? (page 59)



CHAPTER SEVEN & CONCLUSION

Sharing the Story as a Way of Life

ACTS 17:16-34
ACTS 28:16-31

Chapter 7 & Conclusion: Sharing the Story as a Way of Life

Acts 17:16-25, 32-34 (NRSVue)

¹⁶While Paul was waiting for them in Athens, he was deeply distressed to see that the city was full of idols. ¹⁷So he argued in the synagogue with the Jews and the devout persons and also in the marketplace every day with those who happened to be there. ¹⁸Also some Epicurean and Stoic philosophers debated with him. Some said, “What does this pretentious babbler want to say?” Others said, “He seems to be a proclaimer of foreign divinities.” (This was because he was telling the good news about Jesus and the resurrection.) ¹⁹So they took him and brought him to the Areopagus and asked him, “May we know what this new teaching is that you are presenting? ²⁰It sounds rather strange to us, so we would like to know what it means.” ²¹Now all the Athenians and the foreigners living there would spend their time in nothing but telling or hearing something new. ²²Then Paul stood in front of the Areopagus and said, “Athenians, I see how extremely spiritual you are in every way. ²³For as I went through the city and looked carefully at the objects of your worship, I found among them an altar with the inscription, ‘To an unknown god.’ What therefore you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you. ²⁴The God who made the world and everything in it, he who is Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in shrines made by human hands, ²⁵nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all mortals life and breath and all things. ³²When they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some scoffed, but others said, “We will hear you again about this.” ³³At that point Paul left them. ³⁴But some of them joined him and became believers, including Dionysius the Areopagite and a woman named Damaris and others with them.

Acts 28:30-31 (NRSVue)

³⁰He lived there two whole years at his own expense and welcomed all who came to him, ³¹proclaiming the kingdom of God and teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ with all boldness and without hindrance.

Discussion Questions from the Biblical Text:

1. How would you describe the attitude of Paul’s audience in Athens?
2. How does their attitude shape Paul’s approach to conversation and ministry?
3. What do you notice in this story? What wonderings are stirred for you?

Discussion Questions from *Bearing Witness in Acts and Today* by Troy M. Troftgruben:

1. Who are the people with whom you interact regularly? (page 125)
2. After reading this book (or participating in this study), what do you think about the language “bearing witness”? (page 139)

Discussion Questions from *Opening Space: A vision for Fresh Expressions of Church and Creative Mission* by Shannon Kiser:

1. Fresh Expressions move from listening, love, and service to building community and exploring discipleship. “The exploring discipleship part of the journey is one of the hardest aspects of the fresh expression journey to imagine” (page 53). What connections do you see between bearing witness and the stages of Fresh Expressions we have discussed over the past seven weeks?