

God's Story – Your Story

The time of Jesus is ancient history. Jerusalem is a long way away. Can it really be true that what happened over there, back then, has anything to do with me?

This Lent we trace the story. On Ash Wednesday, we start the book of Acts, with Jesus' initial followers waiting. Waiting for God. Dependent. Is the Jesus story now over? Life, death, resurrection. A wonderful moment in history? No, this moment, over there, back then, was just a start.

Together, we will read the story of those first decades of the Church. How God led His people and transformed them from a small, fragile group of just one race and nationality into a great movement, including many races and nationalities, the rich and poor, young and old, those with disabilities and folks from the establishment. A community full of the presence of God, constantly surprised by God's overflowing kindness and mercy.

On Easter Day as we celebrate Jesus' resurrection, Acts will reach its climax. The end of the story? No way. You might as well ask if Jesus' resurrection is the end of the story. Acts ends with the good news about Jesus being preached boldly and unhindered in Rome – in what for them was the centre of the world. The boundaries and barriers had been broken. God had brought the Christian story from the margins to the centre, and from there it will go to the ends of the earth, even to Lancashire!

It is a great story. Day by day, we will read about real people in all their variety, grasping God's love for them, and being transformed. We will notice how God is at work, His Spirit always seeming to be one step ahead, leading the way. We will see opposition and hardship and people stay loyal to Jesus. But it is more than that.

This is not just a great story. It is our story. If you read this on a bus in Preston or on your sofa in Blackpool, you are reading the beginning of a story which has become your story. Volume 3247 of Acts would be about you. For nothing has changed. The good news of Jesus is still spreading. The boundaries and barriers are still being broken. People in all their variety are still turning to Jesus, receiving the Spirit, and joining the Christian community.

It also holds up a mirror. Acts can open our eyes to see how God might be at work here. Now. If God encouraged, challenged and worked through them, maybe God is doing the same in us today? If only we would notice, take courage and step up.

Charles Wesley's great hymn 'and can it be?' declares "Tis mercy all, immense and free; For, O my God, it found out me." The great story starts in Acts. It has found out you – it is now your story – but what of our neighbours? My prayer is that, as you read Acts this Lent, you will rejoice that God's story is your story, and step out with His Spirit so that it becomes their story too.

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