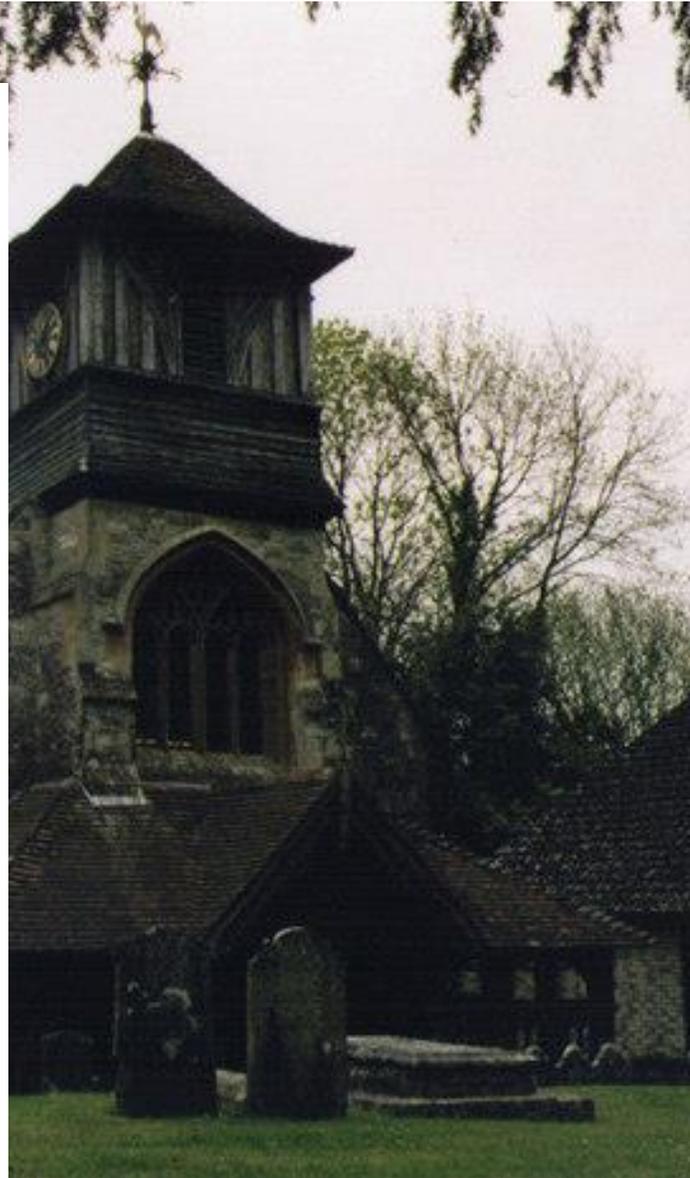


Preparing for a new season

April-July 2018



Exploring the Book of Acts

“Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path”

Psalm 119:105



Exploring Acts

Looking forward as a Parish

As Easter is over and our Lent practices have reached an end, it has been suggested that we, as a Church, follow a reading plan together. The book suggested is the Book of Acts.

We are preparing to enter a new season for the life of the Parish as John and Helen Pawson return in July and John is licensed as our Priest in Charge.

The book of Acts details the formation of the early church and the trials and hardships suffered by the early Christians.

Don't worry if you haven't followed a reading plan before, everything you need to get started is included in this booklet.

By following a reading plan together, we can reflect on what it meant to be a Christian in the early church, what it means to be a Christian now and how we should prepare for our new Priest

We invite you to join together with other parts of the Church Family as we begin this exploration.

“For everything there is a season, a time for every activity under heaven”

Ecclesiastes 3:1

Why read the Bible?

“In the past God spoke to our ancestors through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom also he made the universe. The Son is the radiance of God’s glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word. After he had provided purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven”

Hebrews 1:1-3

According to Biblica (The International Bible Society), the Bible is:

...the account of God’s action in the world, and his purpose with all creation. The writing of the Bible took place over sixteen centuries and is the work of over forty human authors. It is quite an amazing collection of 66 books with very different styles, all containing the message God desired us to have.

The accounts in the Bible were not generally written down as they occurred. Rather they were told over and over again and handed down through the years, before eventually being written down. Yet the same themes may be found throughout the book. Along with the diversity, there is also remarkable unity throughout.

How to read the Bible

The Bible was written in Hebrew and Greek. Modern translations focus on being more precise and are best for Bible study, while others focus on readability and are great for devotions.

Choose a Bible that you can follow – as a Parish we usually use the NIV (New International Version) but you might prefer the NLT, Good News or Message versions. If you are reading the Bible electronically, it sometimes helps to read the same verses in different versions.

Set aside time each day – our plan has 5 different readings each week ideal for Monday to Friday. Try to choose the same time so that it becomes part of your routine.

Before you start, pray – asking God to help you understand what He is trying to say, to direct you in the way He wants you to move and how to implement it in your life. Read the questions that come with each week.

Don't try to read too much when you are following a plan - each week of this plan consists of five short readings – allowing you to spend time reflecting on what you have read and the questions that have been posed.

After you have finished reflect on the questions – it may help to write down the thoughts that you have had. If you are a member of a small group, you might want to chat about the study with them when you meet.

Reflecting on what you have read

It can be helpful to have a structured way of reflecting on the passages that you have read. The following is a very simple practice you could adopt

Observe

- What does it say? Who, What, Where, When, How Repeated words, lists, and themes
- Causal connections – but, therefore, as, because...
- Contrasts and Comparisons

Interpret

- What does it mean?
- What is the author's intent?
- How would the original audience understand it?
- What was the historical context?
- What are the connections with passages before/after?

Apply

- How does it apply to my life?
- Is there a promise to encourage/strengthen me?
- Did I see something about God's character?
- Is there a command to obey?
- How can I pray about this?

Introduction to Acts

Crossway, the organisation behind the ESV, give the following timeline as to where the Book of Acts fits into the historical timeline

c. A.D. 33/34	c. A.D. 46–57	c. A.D. 64–67
Pentecost, conversion of Paul	Paul's missionary journeys	Peter and Paul martyred in Rome

It follows on from the Gospel of Luke and was also written by him, as he travelled with Paul. It describes how the early church was formed and what this meant to the first followers of Jesus – Christians.

The book describes how the Disciples came to terms with Jesus leaving them, and it introduces the third part of the Trinity – the Holy Spirit – when it makes itself known at Pentecost and how it empowered the followers to heal, transform and evangelise even whilst being persecuted

It tells the story of how Peter and Paul travelled, evangelising (telling people about Jesus), from Jerusalem to Rome.



Peter

Simon Peter was one of the first followers of Jesus. He was an outspoken and ardent disciple, one of Jesus' closest friends, an apostle, and a "pillar" of the church (Galatians 2:9) and was the de-facto leader of the Disciples. Peter was enthusiastic, strong-willed, impulsive, and, at times, brash. But for all his strengths, Peter had several failings in his life – including denying that he knew Jesus.

Peter is regarded as the first Pope (Bishop of Rome)

Paul

Paul (Saul) never met Jesus, but he is considered to be the most important early convert and the first significant missionary to preach the Christian gospel to non-Jewish people. He is responsible for many of the books of the New Testament somewhere between 7 and 13 depending on who you ask!

He is also responsible for the concept of justification by faith - we are saved from sin by believing in Jesus.

What to think about

We are preparing for a new season of our Parish – our new Vicar arriving – so we personally and as a Church, can use this time to reflect on what it means to us to be Christian.

Over the weeks that we are following the plan think about the following broad themes:

- Why are you a Christian?
- How is this different from the first Christians?
- How is your faith different to early Christians?
- Life in the early church was not easy – what have you done recently, as a Christian, that was uncomfortable in the modern world?
- Peter and Paul were persecuted, how are you persecuted?
- What did the early Church do better than we currently do?
- What example did they set we should be following?
- What was the most important thing that they did?
- What could you do to be more like the early Church?
- How can you help our Church to be more Christ-like?

It may be useful to journal what you think as you go through the plan and to look back during the weeks to see if your thoughts have changed

Our Prayer

You may wish to use this prayer before you start reading the passages

Lord Jesus,

We ask that through your word you reveal your vision of our New Season, that you bless us as we prepare for John and Helen's arrival,

We pray your blessing on John and Helen as they prepare for their New Season,

We pray that we can learn more about what it means to be a follower of Jesus from the early Church

We ask that you help us accept the challenges that you set us, reveal where we need to make changes

We pray that we recognise the promises that you have made, and help us to strengthen our faith in them

Lord, we pray that today, we take another step towards you

Amen