

FK Study Paper 2002-2003

The Mission of the Church

A series of Bible studies from the Acts of the Apostles by Phil Mason and other members of the FK committee.

Further reading: Commentaries on the Acts of the Apostles

1: Acts 2 v43-47 Commonwealth of the Kingdom

This picture of the early Church may in some ways be reported here through “rose coloured” spectacles but still provides a summary of their life together. In many ways this can be seen as the base for their “mission.” The life of this community of faith is a mission statement in itself, the way that they live their life together.

In the passage there seems to be an acceptance of those from all backgrounds including those who were not economically successful, but still part of the fellowship and in need of support.

Crucial elements to their early life together were Worship, fellowship, hospitality, sharing of food and distributing of wealth. There was a real sense of community and each having to play a part within it. A real sense of the whole people of God. The distinctiveness of the community was an attraction to those outside it.

- 1) What wealth is at our disposal in Kingdom terms?
- 2) Does the “dog collar” restrict the untapping and the use of resources?
- 3) Should "signs and wonders" play any part in our mission today?
- 4) Can we or should we try to replicate the totality of the life of the community of Acts in living our mission today?
- 5) How can today's Church promote an image of a distinctive and attractive community to those outside?

2: Acts 6 v1-7 Flexible Patterns of Ministry

Here is a hint that the Church was moving from a “movement” to more of an institution at this point in its life. The first office bearers were appointed here not to talk but to act. However there was soon some overlap. Steven had to preach and Philip ends up talking to the Ethiopian Eunuch (chpt 8).

- 1) What is our core activity and how much displacement work goes on?
- 2) What are the things that we need to stop doing in order for time / resources to be freed up for mission?
- 3) If we can think of the need for "ministry" in the church as opposed to ministers - what ministry is necessary for the maintenance and mission of the church? If we were to work in teams what sort of

- people can undertake various specialised tasks? (presbyters, local preachers, deacons, lay workers etc.)
- 4) How does the church “learn to live” with fewer Presbyter ministers?

3: Acts 8 v9-25 Tricks of the Trade

If you spend time in the spirituality/religion section of Waterstone's you will find many more books on witchcraft, divination and esoteric religions than on Christianity. Martyn Atkins suggested in his lectures at the FK conference that the Church of the future needs to sit lightly to the “New Age“ Spirituality and not be so suspicious of it all. We need to recognise that some elements could be used in a Christian context. Not unlike the way the church in earlier times took over Easter and Christmas traditions for the use of the faith.

- 1) Who are the “Simon’s “ in today’s society?
- 2) How do you define “legitimate” spirituality?
- 3) How do we account for the popularity amongst teens and pre-teens of "Harry Potter", "Buffy the Vampire Slayer", "Sabrina the Teenage Witch", or "Charmed"? (Ask a young person if you are not familiar with these books and TV series) Are such stories dangerous?
- 4) Should the church be concerned more about attempts to catch children's imagination with books like "The Teenage Witch Handbook" which is said to contain genuine spells and rituals that work?
- 5) How do we react to the inclusion of pagans and witches into multi-faith discussions? (They have been included in the Edinburgh Inter-faith forum)
- 6) How do we perceive the presence of the Spirit?

4: Acts 10 Breaking the Rules

Here we see an example of scriptural rules being broken for the sake of mission. This was a defining and a conversion moment for both Peter and Cornelius. Everyone is on one level. God treats everyone the same even the Gentiles.

- 1) What rules might we be prepared to break for the sake of mission? Are there any we wouldn't break? Why? Who sets the rules?
- 2) Does the story give us any hints about how to approach issues like homosexuality, our current policy on sex offenders, drugs? What mission aspects are involved?
- 3) Should there be rules for conduct when proselytising members of other faith communities?
- 4) Is our church really a welcoming and inclusive community?
- 5) Is it possible to be inclusive and, at the same time, challenge some beliefs and behaviours that we see as being incompatible with the church?

5: Acts 13 Breaking New Ground

We might not travel to new ground - it might come to us. There is difficulty in breaking new ground in that it shakes our own security and comfort. It also introduces vulnerability. It is not easy to understand the culture of new ground or to relate to that culture. We must be culturally relevant but not totally sell out to what may, in time, be seen to be a passing fad.

- 1) Are there any non-Christian forums today where a Christian would be encouraged to address "some words of encouragement?"
- 2) How would we cope with rejection?
- 3) God guided the apostles but the response was poor. Is that OK?
- 4) Is it enough to simply offer the message?
- 5) Discuss the success of "alternative" services in appealing to those outside church culture.

6: Acts 16 v1-10 Into Unknown Territory

This passage highlights Paul's willingness to act on the basis of a vision he received. Here is a commitment to live on the edge and take risks. In the following chapters we see how Paul holds on to that vision even in the face of opposition and conflict. It actually takes until Chapter 20 for the apostles to get to Macedonia, and then the bible does not include much detail about the visit and they only stayed for three months. Visions can take time to come to fruition and may not be in the ways that we expect.

- 1) Are we too settled in the Church to advance in Mission?
- 2) What aspects of other cultures will we accept to get close to them for Mission purposes?
- 3) Are those who claim to see visions accepted in the Church today?
- 4) What does the Church do to visionaries?
- 5) What areas of unknown territory are crying out for our help today?
- 6) Are our plans and strategies flexible enough to let the Holy Spirit get a word in edge ways?