

"Acts of the Apostles: Becoming the Church" by Faber McMullen, Union Grove Baptist Church ©2018

"Picking up the Pieces After the Resurrection"
"Understanding who we are because of what He has done"

To look at the Acts of the Apostles we must start with the author. Tradition and substantial evidence support the belief that Luke, a physician/medical doctor, was the author of both the Gospel according to Luke and the book we now call the Acts of the Apostles. Scholars believe that he was a friend of Mary, the mother of Jesus, and that she gave him information on Jesus' life, death, and resurrection.

Interestingly both books are addressed to Theophilus who was either a real person or it could be a generic way of addressing "all believers". Theophilus means "Lover of God". It was a common name in the early Church, but it is easy to see how it could have been addressed to all believers wherever they might be.

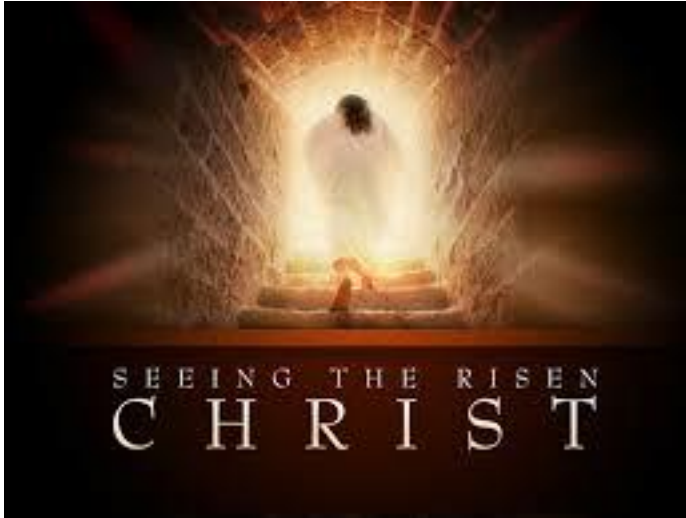
I have limited knowledge of Greek, but scholars tell us that both the Gospel According to Luke (Luke) and The Acts of the Apostles (Acts) have the same style, vocabulary, and grammar. Luke accompanied Paul on his second and third missionary journeys. We know he accompanied Paul as his account of what went on includes the pronoun "we" in certain sections of the Book of Acts.

Evidence supports that the book was written about thirty years after the resurrection of Jesus. The book is an early book, probably being written prior to AD 64. We believe this because Luke doesn't mention anything about Paul's death which scholars calculate to be in AD 67. Luke doesn't mention Nero's persecution, the martyrdom of James or the fall of Jerusalem and the destruction of the Temple in AD 70. These are huge events that Luke would absolutely have mentioned.

Acts gives us a glance into the most primitive and earliest days of the church. In Acts we see early church fathers wrestling with how Jews and Gentiles will be incorporated into this new faith founded upon Jesus, the risen rabbi. Deacons aren't even called deacons at this point (Acts 6:1-6), and there's no theology as is developed in the later Epistles. The basic theme of the book is that of a narrative of what happened in the days and years right after the resurrection. It describes how a little band of believers is transformed by God into the Church that will impact the world forever. The narrative is focused on two centers of early church activity: Jerusalem and Antioch. The two main apostles are Peter and Paul. The geography of the book is as follows:

Acts 1:1-8:3 - Jerusalem
Acts 8:4-12:25 - Judea & Samaria
Acts 13-28) - The "uttermost parts"

But, before we look at Dr. Luke's Book of Acts, let's go back now to Dr. Luke's account of where it all began: the resurrection of Jesus the Messiah.



Luke 24 On the first day of the week, very early in the morning, the women took the spices they had prepared and went to the tomb. ²They found the stone rolled away from the tomb, ³but when they entered, they did not find the body of the Lord Jesus. ⁴While they were wondering about this, suddenly two men in clothes that gleamed like lightning stood beside them. ⁵In their fright the women bowed down with their faces to

the ground, but the men said to them, “Why do you look for the living among the dead? ⁶He is not here; he has risen! Remember how he told you, while he was still with you in Galilee: ⁷‘The Son of Man must be delivered over to the hands of sinners, be crucified and on the third day be raised again.’” ⁸Then they remembered his words. ⁹When they came back from the tomb, they told all these things to the Eleven and to all the others. ¹⁰It was Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the others with them who told this to the apostles. ¹¹But they did not believe the women, because their words seemed to them like nonsense. ¹²Peter, however, got up and ran to the tomb. Bending over, he saw the strips of linen lying by themselves, and he went away, wondering to himself what had happened. (Luke 24:1-8 NKJV).

Luke then gives an account of Jesus appearing to "two of them" who were on the road to Emmaus. This happened on the Sunday afternoon of His resurrection. At first the two did not recognize Him, but as they told Jesus of the events of the crucifixion and resurrection, the text tells us that He began to take them through the scriptures proving that He was the Messiah and that He came for the purpose of redeeming all men. It wasn't until they sat at a table to eat that as Jesus broke the bread and gave thanks that they recognized who He was. He then disappeared, and they asked each other, "Were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us?" ³³They got up and returned at once to Jerusalem. There they found the Eleven and those with them, assembled together ³⁴and saying, "It is true! The Lord has risen and has appeared to Simon." ³⁵Then the two told what had happened on the way, and how Jesus was recognized by them when he broke the bread. (Luke 24:31-35 NKJV).

Jesus Appears to the Disciples

³⁶While they were still talking about this, Jesus himself stood among them and said to them, "Peace be with you." ³⁷They were startled and frightened, thinking they saw a ghost. ³⁸He said to them, "Why are you troubled, and why do doubts rise in your minds? ³⁹Look at my hands and my feet. It is I myself! Touch me and see; a ghost does not have flesh and bones, as you see I have." ⁴⁰When he had said this, he showed them

his hands and feet. ⁴¹ And while they still did not believe it because of joy and amazement, he asked them, "Do you have anything here to eat?" ⁴² They gave him a piece of broiled fish, ⁴³ and he took it and ate it in their presence.

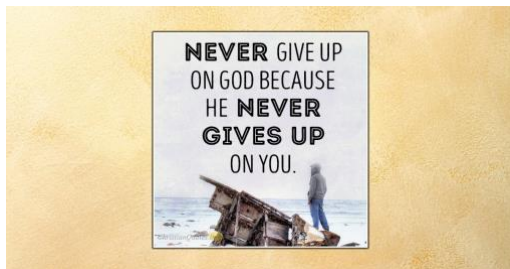
⁴⁴ He said to them, "This is what I told you while I was still with you: Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms."

⁴⁵ Then he opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures. ⁴⁶ He told them, "This is what is written: The Messiah will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, ⁴⁷ and repentance for the forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. ⁴⁸ You are witnesses of these things. ⁴⁹ I am going to send you what my Father has promised; but stay in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high."

The Ascension of Jesus

⁵⁰ When he had led them out to the vicinity of Bethany, he lifted up his hands and blessed them. ⁵¹ While he was blessing them, he left them and was taken up into heaven. ⁵² Then they worshiped him and returned to Jerusalem with great joy. ⁵³ And they stayed continually at the temple, praising God.

I wanted to read this together this morning to give a freshness to how things felt right after the disappointment of the crucifixion and then the uncertainty and disbelief of the resurrection. We don't look at the account of the death and resurrection of Jesus enough. It's usually only something we look at during our resurrection celebration, Easter. This gospel account is followed by Luke's narrative in the Book of Acts which details how those early believers picked up the pieces after they realized who Jesus was and what He had done.



My first observation is that His followers didn't expect Him to rise. I think they had given up on Him. Verse one tells us they were going to anoint His body with oil and spices. They were not returning expecting an empty tomb. This tells us that we are not the first followers to harbor doubts. Verse four tells us that when they saw that the stone had been rolled away

"they were wondering about this". They were as confused as we get sometimes with really believing that something miraculous has taken place or that something miraculous will take place. They were ready to give up on God. The text tells us that "in their fright they bowed their faces to the ground". It was the angels who first gave a hint that the wonderful impossible had happened. The angel asked, "Why do you look for the living among the dead?" The angels had to remind them that NONE of this had taken God by surprise. Never give up on God because He never gives up on you.

The angels reminded them of the mission of Jesus on earth. Somehow, they had all ignored what scripture had said about Jesus, and they had decided to ignore what Jesus had said about Himself and His mission. When they finally believed, they went and told the disciples. And what was the response of the disciples? The text tells us that the men "did not believe the women because their words seemed like nonsense." The very disciples who had personally known Him had many of the same fears, doubts, and misunderstandings that we experience.

I love verse twelve because it shows that Peter thought that maybe just maybe this miracle had really happened. He got up and RAN to find "strips of linen lying by themselves." And you know what? Even then he didn't believe conclusively that Jesus had risen from the dead just as He had said He would. The text tell us that Peter left "wondering to himself what had happened."

*Lord I worship
You, because of
who You are*

Verse thirty six and following show that all of the disciples were afraid. They had to touch his body to realize that He was real. In the forty days following the resurrection Jesus appeared again and again to those who had loved Him. It was during this time that they went from being scared Jewish disciples to being "Christ-Followers" who came to an understanding of who Jesus was, and what He had done for each of them. It is not what they did that defined them. Rather, they became defined by what He had done for each of them on the cross, and by their true belief in what He had done.

The last song we sang before the message this morning was picked out by Larry specifically for this message. On Monday night Larry and I met, cooked dinner, and picked out the songs for this service. I was trying to explain to Larry where I felt the Lord leading us this week. I told him that in the aftermath of the crucifixion and resurrection, His followers were trying to pick up the pieces. When they realized what He had done they began to understand the great value and worth they had in God's eyes. Larry said God had been focusing him all week on the song which expresses that.

As I told Janie Ramirez last week in our worship service, if she had been the only person on earth, Jesus would have died for her sins alone. This gives Janie infinite and unmeasured value and worth. And not only that, the fact that Jesus died for each of us attributes that value and worth to each one of us. It is not what Janie has done that gives her worth. It is not her job, her status, her family, her money, or her accomplishments. What gives her and each of us worth is that God made us in His image and He sent Jesus to die for each of us. We are precious in His sight. He has a place, a purpose, and a plan for each of us. God seeks to establish who you are. Satan seeks to lie to you about who you are.

God	Satan
Stills You	Rushes You
Reassures You	Frightens You
Leads You	Pushes You
Enlightens You	Confuses You
Forgives You	Condemns You
Calms You	Stresses You
Encourages You	Discourages You
Comforts You	Worries You

I'm here to tell you this morning not to give up on God. He is not about to give up on you. Don't listen to Satan. Listen to Jesus. It doesn't matter how you have failed, made the wrong decision, or made a mess of things. He is ready and willing to do a miracle in your life. Your life isn't over. Your life is only just beginning. Life is so brief and it really does fade quickly. I think that is why

I love being your pastor. It sometimes feels like the only real and permanent thing I am involved in. It has everlasting consequences. You will not take the earthly treasures you have accumulated to heaven. You will take only your acts of obedience and worship, and you will take your relationships with you. The song we sang really does convey this truth.

*Who am I That the Lord of all the earth
Would care to know my name
Would care to feel my hurt*

*Who am I That the bright and morning star
Would choose to light the way
For my ever wandering heart*

*Not because of who I am
But because of what You've done
Not because of what I've done
But because of who You are*

*I am a flower quickly fading
Here today and gone tomorrow
A wave tossed in the ocean
A vapor in the wind*

*Still You hear me when I'm calling
Lord, You catch me when I'm falling
And You told me who I am
I am Yours*

*Who am I
That the eye that's seen my sin
Would look on me with love
And watch me rise again*

*Who am I
That the voice that calmed the sea
Would call out through the rain
And calm the storm in me*

Let us pray.

<p>Union Grove is one of the oldest Baptist communities of faith in the State of Texas dating back to 1844. Pastor Faber McMullen may be reached by email at uniongrove362@gmail.com or by snail mail at: 15301 FM 362, Navasota, Texas 77868. Tel: 936-825-1227 (Edited and proofed by Amanda Fryday - Webster, Texas.)</p>
