

1 In my former book, Theophilus, I wrote about all that Jesus began to do and to teach ² until the day he was taken up to heaven, after giving instructions through the Holy Spirit to the apostles he had chosen. ³ After his suffering, he presented himself to them and gave many convincing proofs that he was alive. He appeared to them over a period of forty days and spoke about the kingdom of God. ⁴ On one occasion, while he was eating with them, he gave them this command: “Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about. ⁵ For John baptized with ^[a] water, but in a few days you will be baptized with ^[b] the Holy Spirit.”

⁶ Then they gathered around him and asked him, “Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?”

⁷ He said to them: “It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority. ⁸ But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”

⁹ After he said this, he was taken up before their very eyes, and a cloud hid him from their sight.

¹⁰ They were looking intently up into the sky as he was going, when suddenly two men dressed in white stood beside them. ¹¹ “Men of Galilee,” they said, “why do you stand here looking into the sky? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven.”

Matthias Chosen to Replace Judas

¹² Then the apostles returned to Jerusalem from the hill called the Mount of Olives, a Sabbath day’s walk ^[c] from the city. ¹³ When they arrived, they went upstairs to the room where they were staying. Those present were Peter, John, James and Andrew; Philip and Thomas, Bartholomew and Matthew; James son of Alphaeus and Simon the Zealot, and Judas son of James. ¹⁴ They all joined together constantly in prayer, along with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brothers.

¹⁵ In those days Peter stood up among the believers (a group numbering about a hundred and twenty) ¹⁶ and said, “Brothers and sisters, ^[d] the Scripture had to be fulfilled in which the Holy Spirit spoke long ago through David concerning Judas, who served as guide for those who arrested Jesus. ¹⁷ He was one of our number and shared in our ministry.”

¹⁸ (With the payment he received for his wickedness, Judas bought a field; there he fell headlong, his body burst open and all his intestines spilled out. ¹⁹ Everyone in Jerusalem heard about this, so they called that field in their language Akeldama, that is, Field of Blood.)

²⁰ “For,” said Peter, “it is written in the Book of Psalms:

“May his place be deserted;
let there be no one to dwell in it,^[e]
and,

“May another take his place of leadership.”^[f]

²¹Therefore it is necessary to choose one of the men who have been with us the whole time the Lord Jesus was living among us, ²²beginning from John’s baptism to the time when Jesus was taken up from us. For one of these must become a witness with us of his resurrection.”

²³So they nominated two men: Joseph called Barsabbas (also known as Justus) and Matthias. ²⁴Then they prayed, “Lord, you know everyone’s heart. Show us which of these two you have chosen ²⁵to take over this apostolic ministry, which Judas left to go where he belongs.” ²⁶Then they cast lots, and the lot fell to Matthias; so he was added to the eleven apostles.

2: ⁴⁷praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.

May the words of my mouth, and the meditation of our hearts, be acceptable in thy sight, O LORD, our strength, and our redeemer.

This is the longest text I have ever preached on. It is certainly one of the most important.

In the text today we hear of the beginnings of what would become the Christian Church. From the humble beginning over 2000 years ago in Roman-occupied Palestine, it is believed that, across the world today, there are 2.2 billion people who follow Jesus Christ. As the population of the world is said to be 7.96 billion, then one in every three people is a Christian. That should give us great hope.

But – let us go back to that long-ago beginning, when the Word of God, began its journey around the world.

The Book of Acts follows on from the Gospels and was written by St Luke.

Who was St Luke?

We know from Paul’s Letter to the Colossians 4.14, that Luke was a physician. Paul calls him ‘the beloved physician,’ and from Paul in Philemon 24, Luke is described as a fellow worker in Christ, so he was both a doctor and a missionary. He is known as St Luke, the Evangelist.

There is mystery about Luke, as to what his origins are, apart from him being a Gentile. He is thought to have come from Antioch in Syria. It is clear from his writing style that Luke was well-educated and had a gift for writing. That he was a doctor is attested by the traces of medical language and interest in medical matters that appear in his Gospel and in the Book of Acts.

The next questions is: Who is Theophilus?

That has been debated by many. The name appears in Luke's Gospel and in Acts, both in the first verses. It is also notable that both the Gospel and Acts are written as letters.

Theophilus may have been Jewish. He may have been a Roman official. He may have been St Paul's lawyer.

There is another explanation. Theophilus can be translated as "loved by God." We know that God loves us, even when we sin. It is therefore possible that the Gospel and the Books of Acts were addressed to all humankind down the centuries since the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, that all of us, including you and me, would hear the Word of God.

In the 40 days that Jesus stayed with the Apostles He was teaching them and was also further proof of His resurrection. We hear only of the Apostles however others will have seen Him.

Then came His ascension. After a few final words, we read in verse 9 Jesus *"was taken up before their very eyes, and a cloud hid him from their sight."*

Moments later, the Apostles were addressed by two men in white – angels who told them not to stand staring into the sky. Jesus was now in heaven. They also said that Jesus would return the same way – on a cloud. His return could be anytime as Paul states in 1 Thessalonians 5:2, emphasizing that we should all be ready for that return by living according to the teachings of Jesus.

That is what we should do. We should not stand around speculating on when Jesus will return. We should get on with the tasks God has given us to do in serving Him.

We now need to refer to the Gospels. In Mathew 16:13 to 16, Jesus asks His disciples who they say He is. Peter replies, "You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God."

This is a very significant moment. It is the first acknowledgment by a disciple of who Jesus is. It is significant for another reason; it is the moment Jesus chooses who will lead the disciples, and therefore, the church once He was gone.

You are Peter, and on this rock I will build my congregation, and the gates of the Grave will not overpower it." (Matthew 16: 18-18)

The word rock is used often in the Bible.

In 2 Samuel 22:47 we read –

*47 "The LORD lives, and blessed be my rock,
and exalted be my God, ^ethe rock of my salvation,*

In Psalm 95:1 –

*95 Oh come, let us sing to the LORD;
let us make a joyful noise to the rock of our salvation!*

The term rock of my salvation was not a specific mention of the Messiah for there were only veiled references to whom was to come because of God's love for us however the phrase did mean deliverance. King David's use of the term was an allusion to the many times he hid in caves while King Saul was pursuing him in order to kill him.

Jesus's words to Peter and his reference to the rock on which he would build his congregation was a statement that faith in Jesus as the Messiah was the foundation of the Church. Peter and the other faithful disciples would help to bring about that Church as they spread the word about Jesus.

This means, too, that each of us who help to bring someone to faith in Jesus Christ are continuing to help to build the Church. It comes back to the statement that we who are faith are the body of Christ.

It is not in today's reading but soon after Jesus was taken up to heaven there occurred Pentecost where a sound like wind gushed through the room where the disciples of Jesus were gathered and flames of cold fire touched each person, enabling them to hear and speak other languages.

Some bystanders claimed they were all drunk but Peter stood up and made a speech. It was the first sermon of what became the Christian Church.

Pentecost is when the Christian Church went public. The meetings earlier, after the Resurrection of Jesus were behind closed doors. Not anymore.

About three thousand people repented and were baptised that day. That many sought forgiveness for their sins and were given it. That many people went to their homes in Jerusalem, or wherever they lived in Palestine, or in the countries around to begin to spread the news.

It was the ripple effect we see when a stone is thrown into the water. It is the ripple effect when we, who follow, Jesus Christ, help to spread the Word by our own words or by our actions.

It cannot be called revival because revival occurs as a resurgence after an initial surge. There have been many such resurges throughout the history of the Church. There have been periods of lowness and dryness followed by revival. It has been the same throughout history as reading the Bible tells us.

We are passing through one now.

We need not worry. It is God's Church. It will not fade away, but we might. It is so easy to become discouraged. We see all around us the sinning and we feel the temptations. We are encouraged to do this or that things by experts in persuasion. We only need to look at the TV advertisements and even the news.

Yet, we should never forget that we have a very powerful asset. Two, in fact, for we have God and we have prayer.

In 1 Thessalonians 17-18, St Paul wrote: *"Pray without ceasing; in everything give thanks, for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus."*

A few weeks ago, I was in great dismay. I had been diagnosed with a problem that could have resulted in my becoming totally blind. Horrors! My life is such that I need my eyes. Despite my fear – and it was great – I knew that God was with me all my way through that time. He was, and is, only a prayer away with Jesus by His side, supporting us, in our needs. In that support, I recognised that I had had a personal renewal. Fear can bring doubts. Faith can remove them. Although I had not had a lessening of faith, I still received a personal revival.

That is the word – revival, or renewal. God renews us when we are down, He revives our spirits.

The same is of the Church. Yes, matters are not going well with the Church, in the wide and the particular. There is concern, worry and fear and matter are not looking good. Our Church and our faith are under attack by those who would see the Word of God silenced.

It will not happen. It is God's Church, and we are His people, adopted through our faith in Jesus and our acceptance of Him in our hearts.

Recently, in my reading, I found the term Gospel Resilience. It means that what we read in the Gospels and the Scriptures are strong. What was true yesterday, each time God spoke, and later, during His life, Jesus spoke is the same today and tomorrow and all the tomorrows that God has granted us, as individuals and as a Church.

The questions become personal.

What can we, or I, do?

What can we, or I, contribute?

We, or I, am only an ordinary person.

We can do much,

I will use the illustration I have used before.

We can stand in a corner, looking in away from the world. Or we can stand facing out of the corner with our arms outstretched to welcome the world.

That is the choice each of us must make.

We, each of us, can experience personal revival. It is only a prayer away.

How often do you pray?

Is it daily? Is it in the morning or at night just before you turn the lights out?

Do you pray only for family and friends?

How often do you read your Bible, stopping to consider all that is written.

What does it mean?

How does it affect me?

We can also pray for revival in the Church.

I would like to offer a suggestion here.

What if, each person here, agreed that, once a day, at a specific time chosen by the congregation, that, although you may live distantly from each other, that you set aside a definite time to pray together. You will be separated by distance but not by faith.

I am involved in something similar on-line with a praying friend each Tuesday morning at 9am for thirty minutes. It is powerful praying.

I will finish in prayer.

Father in heaven

We are living in a world of pain and sorrow.

We are living in a world where there are many who would see your church and your people silenced.

We are living in a world where despair is mounting.

We pray for your help in this time.

We pray to see a resurgence and revival in your church, among your people.

We pray for the conflict, the violence, and the hate to be overcome by your love.

We pray for your holy Spirit to come like at Pentecost with the sound of wind and the flames of fire.

We pray for encouragement where there is desolation growing within us.

*We pray all this is the name of Jesus Christ, our Lord and Saviour who lives with you and the Holy Spirit, one God forever and ever **Amen***