

## **Sermon on the Acts of the Apostles**

Nick Robins, Christ Church, 19 April 2026

“In the Name of the Father,  
and of the Son,  
and of the Holy Spirit, Amen”

Can you recall a time when you were you really excited about your life? Perhaps it was just yesterday, perhaps it was a while back.

But we have all had times when we feel something truly wonderful is happening in our lives.

And when we re-read the final verse of today’s passage from the second chapter of Acts, there was something wonderful happening to the early Christians.

Verse 41 says: “So those who welcomed his message, were baptized, and that day about three thousand were added”

Imagine that happening today in Wimbledon: three thousand people being so excited about the Good News of Jesus that they decide to get baptized and become Christians right here in Christ Church.

People would be spilling out into the garden, into the hall and into the car park. It would unusual, exciting, motivating: it would be a spectacular occasion. We would certainly need more cups for coffee and tea.

And back in Palestine in the days and weeks after the resurrection, this ‘Conversion of the Three Thousand’ was particularly spectacular. Because there were only 120 Christian women and men at the beginning of Acts.

Today, I’d like to explore how we can build this sense of excitement in our lives by drawing deeply on the Book of Acts.

**The first step is to read and learn from the Bible**

Here I must make a confession. Until this year, I had never sat down to read the Bible at any length.

I was confirmed as an Anglican as a boy and went to church at school. But there was no Christian faith in my family. For me, it was a badge of honour to skive the school services. I came up with a theory that God was so disappointed by our continuing greed, selfishness and violence that he had left this solar system seeking out another where there was still some hope.

Then I discovered the spiritual life through my wife Ritu. When we got married, I noticed that she knelt and prayed every night to her Hindu gods. Because I loved her, I thought I should take prayer seriously too. I knew I was not a Hindu and I was also not a Buddhist. So, I looked closer to home at Christianity, starting with the Quakers, amongst the most impressive Christians in England.

But the services were too quiet and I wanted some singing. And so on the recommendation of my good friend, Ian Christie, I came here to Christ Church and began a long spiritual quest. During the past decade or so, I have struggled with many aspects of our faith. And I still find it very strange that in our Credo, we protestants call ourselves catholic!

It is through action that I have come to be a Christian, particularly taking part in our services: being a server getting things prepared for Sunday worship, the honour of offering the chalice at Communion. And now giving my first sermon today.

Yet apart from occasional readings of the Gospel, I had never read the Bible seriously. So, this Lent I decided to read the Acts of the Apostles. I wanted to know what the first Christians actually did: perhaps it would help me on my journey. And I was astounded. It is a riveting story and really exciting.

This takes me to the **second step**: the need to translate what we learn in the Bible into lived action.

Acts is not surprisingly all about action.

So, how did these early Christians live?

If we look three verses on from today's reading, we find their secret.

"All who believed were together and had all things in common." (Acts 2.44). The early Christians lived as a community and shared everything.

Who were these early Christians?

Like the fishermen who made up so many of the original apostles, they were everyday people with essential skills. Paul was a tentmaker, as were Aquila and Priscilla, the husband and wife team who worked with him. Importantly, just as it was Mary Magdalene who was first to see the risen Christ, so women were very active in the early church, including Lydia, a mistress of dying purple cloth.

And what does Acts tell us about their actions?

The first priority of the early Christians was to spread our faith by "speaking **boldly** in the Lord" (Acts 14.3). They had courage.

Like Jesus, they also exercised a practical compassion, healing the sick and organising relief when a famine struck.

For me, these profound lessons inform my work to combat climate change, which is hitting the most vulnerable communities the hardest including in Zimbabwe where our link parish of St Francis of Assisi is located.

The organisation, Christian Climate Action, says there are three things we as Christians must do in the face of the climate crisis.

- ***We must find our courage*** and take meaningful action.
- ***We must cease doing harm***: stop adding to the problem.
- ***We must return to our roots***, the roots laid out in Acts.<sup>1</sup>

That's why I am going to the port of Santa Marta in Colombia tomorrow to take part in the world's first conference to speed the transition away from fossil fuels. Burning coal, oil and gas is the prime cause of increasingly catastrophic climate change.

Fossil fuels are also a major source of global insecurity as we have seen following Russia's invasion of Ukraine and now in the wake of the US and Israeli war on Iran.

So, let's return to the Christian community of Acts.

How were these early Christians treated by the establishment?

Just like Jesus, they faced immense opposition from the Jewish and Roman imperial establishment. They were abused, imprisoned, tortured and some were killed.

But still they continued and the movement grew.

For St. Paul, the leading character of Acts, the lesson was clear as we heard earlier this year in a reading from his letter to the Romans:

“Suffering produces endurance, endurance produces character and character produces hope” he wrote, adding that “hope does not disappoint us, because God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us.” (Romans 5.3-5).

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<sup>1</sup> This is taken from Christian Climate Action's recent report, Stop Crucifying Creation: <https://christianclimateaction.org/2025/09/01/christian-climate-action-asks-church-of-england-to-stop-crucifying-creation/>

In the end, some 300 years later, Christianity became the official religion of Rome. With persistence, Christians had overcome one of the most powerful empires in history.

**This takes me to my third and final point: the excitement and joy offered by Jesus Christ, relieving us of our burdens.**

It might seem strange to be talking about joy at the same time as recalling the suffering that the followers of Christ faced in the Palestine of his times and still face in the Palestine of today.

Yet all through Acts is a deep sense of a tender God. One of the most intimate moments comes in Acts 12, when Paul is imprisoned in a castle to prevent the Sadducee mob from tearing him apart.

During the night, the passage tells us, “the Lord stood by him and said: ‘Be of good cheer, Paul.’”

I love the way that Jesus calls Paul by name: indeed, each one of us are called individually by God. And as our Priest, Lotwina, has been guiding us in recent months this good cheer means that we **can let go of our burdens, our anxieties**, knowing that God will take care of them.

As St Peter wrote in one of his letters: *“Cast all your anxiety, (your cares, your burdens, your worries) on God, because he cares for you.” (1 Peter 5 vs 7)*

So I hope today’s reading from Acts will inspire us to read the Bible, to act upon what we read and to be freed of our burdens as we all deepen our spiritual activism.

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“Glory be to God on High and in Earth Peace. Amen”

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