Sharing God’s love with the world

Acts 1vv1-11

**Getting started**

*Think about 2 people- Frances and James- both of whom live in our area. Frances rarely leaves BN16. Indeed going to Chichester is an adventure! Her thoughts are almost entirely local – her family and her friends. James is a businessman who is on a plane twice a month. He is always thinking about North America and Asia, where he visits regularly.*

1. Are you more like Frances or James? Are your thoughts and dreams mostly local or global?
2. How much do you think about the spread of the gospel world-wide? Does it feature much as an interest, and find its way into your prayers?

**Into the text**

*In Acts 1, the risen Jesus is speaking to his apostles, helping them to prepare for the role they will have after Jesus has returned to his Father in Heaven (vv9-11)*

1. Looking at v6, do you think the apostles at this point were like Frances or James? What does their question reveal about their hopes for Jesus?
2. What does Jesus want them to realise about:-
3. The role they are to exercise for him (v8);
4. The resources that they are to be given for this new role (v4,8);
5. The places where they are going to be called to minister for him (v8)?
6. How might the following passages have prepared them for this new role, and the resources that they will have (Isaiah 49v6, Joel 2:28-32, John 14v15-21)
7. What impact should Jesus’ ascension and angels’ words (vv9-11) have had upon the apostles?
8. How does the book of Acts reveal the apostles’ obedience to this commission? (see eg 2v38-41, 4v33, 8v4, 11v18, 13v3, 15v19, 28v28-31)

**Applying it personally**

1. How might we interpret our call to be witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and to the ends of the earth?
2. It is perhaps easier to think of being a witness to Jesus locally. How might fulfil this call to be witnesses to the rest of the country, indeed the rest of the world?

*Keith Varney on Sunday suggested some practical ways of surrounding the world with our hands- through becoming more informed and interested about what is happening in the rest of the world, through praying for those places, through giving to facilitate ministry, through volunteering to help spread news of their work, through writing encouraging emails/ texts to mission partners and by even being willing to go to such places -either on a visit or via a career change*

1. Which of these suggestions might be appropriate for you to explore?
2. Might there be one of our current mission partners that you could start supporting more fully this year (see list)

*Pray that we might develop a more global vision for the advance of the gospel, becoming less of Frances and more of a James!*

1) All age slot

During January, we have been thinking about LOVE (Image of a ❤️)

NOT the love we can have for our mums and dads, brothers and sisters, our pets, our friends at school

BUT the love that God has for us, a love that we can share with others.

And as we come to the end of the month, I wanted to show you a prayer ( Image of 🙏 emoji one that one of the first leaders of the Church prayed for a very ordinary group of Christians like you and me!

Here it is. The Apostle Paul prayed for us ‘To grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Jesus’.

Paul knew that our minds would find it hard to take in just how great God’s love is, so he prays that we might see how ‘Wide’ God’s love is

Think about a vast country, Like the United States of America (image of North America). Does anyone know how many miles it is from California in the West to Maine in the east? **3000 miles** !!!

Very wide (arms out wide) God’s love is even wider than that.

Or think about something that is very long. Can you remember going on a motorway (Image of a motorway) boys and girls, perhaps to see grandparents or to go on holiday. That road seems to go on forever. It’s very long (arms out in front). Well God’s love is very long. It NEVER ends, and that’s not boring , but really exciting, it’s good news!

God’s love is ‘High’. Just think about how high the sky is up above us (Person looking up into the sky). It’s really high, isn’t it. We can’t get there by going up a tall building or climbing a hill. We need to get into an airplane . Well God’s love is high (arms up high) and it is ‘Deep’ - deeper than the deepest sea (Image of a deep sea)

According to Mr Google (!) the deepest sea in the world is in the Pacific Ocean and it is 36000 feet deep. That’s the equivalent of 6000 6 foot people put end to end in a great line. That’s really deep (arms down)

Will you join me in doing a bit of exercise ? Stand up – wide, long , high and deep

That’s what Paul wants us to realise the love of God, shown to us in Jesus, is like

* It’s very wide – including everyone
* It’s very long – going on throughout the whole history of the world
* It is very high- filling everywhere, always
* It is very deep – not shallow – here today, gone tomorrow

What an **amazing** love God has for us……

* It’s a love that touches us, our family, our Church here in Angmering, and spreads throughout our village, our county, our country
* Indeed it goes **even wider** than that. The love God has is for the whole world (Image of world) AND SO, we should be willing, eager, to share God’s love throughout the whole world.
* Whenever you forget that, how about doing that simple exercise (wide, long, high and deep) and praying that your mind and heart might fully grasp God’s amazing love…

2) Sermon

Thanks Alby for reading that passage for us, and do keep your Bible open or turn to it -Acts 1 (p1092) as we think about today’s theme of ‘Sharing God’s love with the world’

[Prayer]

As we look at Acts 1, let me set the scene for you.

Jesus has just been crucified, and then raised to life by God the Father.

Before Jesus returns to be with God in Heaven, he spends 40 days with his disciples (Image of risen Jesus with his disciples) reassuring them that he really is alive.

~ I’m sure that we can see why this was necessary…

The disciples had been through an emotional rollercoaster ride , with

* all their hopes smashed as their Master was killed on a cross,
* their distress and disappointment tinged with fear that the authorities would come after them next.
* And then, 3 days later, they saw Jesus alive before their very eyes….

~ Could it really be true? It seemed too wonderful for words!

‘Yes, it is true’ Jesus reassures them over 40 long days as he gives them convincing proofs that he really was alive….

Jesus used this time to prepare them for what was to come…

….Prince Harry talks in his book about the 5 week boot camp that he had to endure at the start of his life in the army, when tough Colour Sergeants prepared them for what they would face as young officers in the Queen’s army. Well, that’s what Jesus was doing for his disciples in this 7 week boot camp in Israel, preparing them for life as officer’s the army of the King of Kings!

And there seem to be 3 main bullet points of Jesus’ teaching

The first was the command to ‘Wait’ . Jesus didn’t want the disciples to rush around frantically like Duracell bunnies in these first few weeks. Rather they were to wait, to wait in Jerusalem – where Jesus had been killed and then raised- and which had been full of pilgrims for the Passover festival and would soon be thronged again with pilgrims for the Feast of Pentecost. They were to stay put, waiting for a precious gift that was going to be given to them to equip them for their new roles as Christ’s apostles.

This gift had been promised centuries earlier by God the Father, and had been repeated by Jesus himself the night before his death.

* With it, they could fulfil their role
* Without it, they’d fall flat on their faces

They needed to wait, rather like a soldier needs to wait for the right equipment before going on a tour of duty!

So what was this gift? It’s the gift of ‘Power’

Just before Jesus burst onto the scene of human history, his cousin John the Baptist had got people ready for his arrival by summoning them to be baptised in the River Jordan

That was an important, a necessary step for people take, a sign of turning away from sin, having those sins washed away by the sovereign work of God’s Messiah who was to come

But John’s work of making people wet was going to be followed by something even greater, as the Messiah could enable them to be baptised with the Holy Spirit, that would bring to them the very power of God himself, on them and in them, so that they could perform their new role for God, to enable the Kingdom of God to grow and deepen.

I’m sure that we all value the gift of power – power to do the job at hand, whether it’s a demanding career, a responsibility in our family, a role in our community

Well, POWER – the might of God- was what the apostles would receive – it was a gift worth waiting for. Indeed , it is a gift they must wait for if they hoped to be effective for God and Jesus…

And look what this power would enable them to be (v8):- ‘Witnesses’

This is a word with a legal flavour to it, so I like it!

It describes the person who enters the witness box in Court and says ‘I saw the defendant knocking the old lady to the ground, stealing her handbag and then jumping into his car and rushing off. I saw it happening- I had a clear view, and I even noted down his number plate.’

That’s the sort of witness you dream of- as a prosecutor!

Well, the apostles are to be witnesses of the life and ministry of Jesus – all he said and the miracles he did. Witnesses of his death. Witnesses of his resurrection.

The Holy Spirit will remind them of all they saw, and give them the right words and sheer courage to tell it to people, many of whom will not want to hear their testimony.

And v8 is a very important verse because in it , Jesus describes for them **WHERE** they are to be witnesses to him

This ministry is going to start in Israel (Map of Israel) obviously, for that is where Jesus had ministered.

They will first be witnesses to Jesus in Jerusalem (arrow to Jerusalem), for this is where they are now, and where they will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

But they will not remain forever in Jerusalem. Pretty soon, they will spread out in Israel, south to Judea (image of arrow to Judea) and then north to Samaria (arrow to Samaria)

Their ministry will START in the land of Israel, which is what we’d expect, since God had promised to bring his Messiah to the people he’d made promises to over the previous 1000 or so years. It would have been very odd if the apostles hadn’t continued to minister to the Jews

BUT their ministry will NOT be limited to the borders of the land of Israel

Look again at what Jesus says in v8

‘You will be my witnesses to the ends of the earth..’

What Jesus wanted his apostles to grasp is that their witness was to extend beyond Israel and spread north, south, west and east (arrows pointing out from Israel) indeed to the very ends of the earth

A good ‘boot camp’ prepares you for the challenges ahead, and Harry says how his at Sandhurst prepared him for the rigours of army life in Iraq. He was grateful that the staff at his army college prepared him for what would lie ahead

And Jesus loved his apostles no less than the colour sergeants cared about their charges at Sandhurst. Indeed he loved them far more, and knew that their roles were going to be even more important than officers of the British Army.

Here in vvv1-8

He takes time to

‘Explain their new job’ to them;

‘Reassure them about (the) resources’ God is going to grant to them, so they don’t feel overwhelmed;

Lastly, he takes time to ‘Widen their vision’

And let me say, it was absolutely CRUCIAL that Jesus did this, for his apostles lack of vision was very clear from their question in v6

The apostles’ hopes seem to have been centred on Israel.

Like President Trump, whose election slogan last time round was ‘Make America great again’, the apostles hoped that Jesus would now make ‘Israel great again’

But Jesus’ vision is wider than just Israel, and so should the apostles’ vision be

Listen to a verse in the OT book of Isaiah that expresses what God hopes for his Servant were to be

‘It is too small a thing for you to be my servant

To restore the tribes of Jacob

And bring back those of Israel I have kept

**I will also make you a light for the Gentiles**

**That my salvation may reach to the ends of the earth**.’

Does that last line ‘ring any bells’ for you?

God’s concern in OT times was that his salvation might reach ‘the ends of the earth’ .

Jesus now commands his apostles to be witnesses ‘to the ends of the earth’

Their job is to fulfil God’s plans which were that salvation would not just reach a few people in the land mass we call ‘Israel’ but might reach all people everywhere.

If you were with us in 2020, when we studied Acts from start to finish, that’s exactly what we saw. The apostles were witnesses throughout Israel – for sure- but then travelled throughout the known world and ended up in the world capital – Rome.

They were faithful to their marching orders in Acts 1

And the same charge comes to us across the centuries. As we wait for Jesus’ return from Heaven, empowered by the Holy Spirit, we are to be courageous witnesses for Jesus, sharing his love very widely indeed.

So here in England (map of England), we Christians in Sussex, are to be witnesses for Jesus in Sussex (arrow to Sussex), throughout England, and then throughout the world (arrows pointing outwards from England)

Perhaps like those original apostles , we need to have our horizons expanded so that we see that we are to be witnesses locally, nationally AND internationally…..

If that sounds like a ‘tall order’, let’s remember

* God’s great plan – to bring salvation everywhere
* Jesus great work – dying in our place to make salvation available everywhere
* The Spirit’s great power – to make frightened rabbits into courageous witnesses
* The world’s great need – to have its sins forgiven , and be reconciled to God for all eternity

Let’s pray for eyes that are opened even wider (image of wide eyed lady) to our role as world wide witnesses.

Well let’s pause there.

A bit later in the service, I have asked one of out church members to help us think through the question:- ‘What does this mean in practice?

But as we wait for some practical suggestions, let’s pray that we might grasp this extraordinary privilege and responsibility given to you and me to be witnesses through whom the risen Jesus speaks to the world..

[Prayer]

In Hand (Globe with hands picture)

What is in ***your*** hands?

* Time on your hands?

You could go and serve abroad, or help out locally [Be a volunteer]

* Praying Hands?

Use a prayer diary provided by many missions, and join our prayer meeting.

* Cash in hand?

Give so others may go and serve.

* Caring hands?

In you career, what did you use your hands for?

Teaching, engineering, caring, administrating, fixing making? That’s what missionaries do!

* So, what should I ***do***?

 Read about a mission, search the web sites. Card with details of our mission partners

Encourage our mission partners by writing, praying supporting, giving, and maybe going.