

April 3, 2016 “The Beat Goes On” Acts 1:1-12

Theophilus. We know next to nothing about Theophilus, other than these basic facts. It is obvious he was someone with a degree of power in the Roman Empire. His name is not Jewish. From the documents themselves we may deduce that the Gospel of Luke and the book of Acts were probably written during one of those periods in which the Apostle Paul was detained in Jail. Luke attended Paul both as physician, and fellow worker. Theophilus is obviously someone whom Luke met, knew, and felt a measure of responsibility towards because of Theophilus' interest in all matters concerning Jesus. It is clear Luke is doing his human best in ministry to fan what he is convinced are the sparks of faith, into life giving fire. And here is why we drop into the book of Acts on this Sunday after the resurrection of Jesus: Luke wants Theophilus to know the facts.

In his Gospel Luke has told Theophilus everything he knows, and is convinced stands up to the scrutiny of an enquiring mind, about Jesus. God is real. Jesus is His Son, born in wondrous and faith evoking circumstances. Jesus took up the ministry of teaching from the Scriptures in the open air, among the people, particularly in Galilee. At the end of 3 years he went to Jerusalem very deliberately, to fulfill the purpose of God. He had come into the world born of Mary to die to save sinners from their sin. Along the way, faith flowered as a result of miracles of healing. Miracles of cleansing. He did not hesitate to forgive sins. He was crucified. He rose from the dead the 3rd day. And then?

The answer to the question what happened next, is in the whole of the 28 chapters of the letter we now call the Book of Acts. It makes a single and singular point. The marvelous things to be

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associated with God's love revealed in Jesus did not end with the cross, nor His rising from the dead 3 days later on the Sunday morning. It went on. It goes on. It will go on until Jesus comes again, the 2nd time. And in the midst of the marvelous things of God, people coming to faith in Jesus, prayers being answered, miracles occurring, the kingdom of God becomes visible in the world, with the emergence of the Church. No denominational label. The Kingdom of God is made visible in the world in the Church that serves God in the name of Jesus and the power of the Holy Spirit.

Specifically, what do we have here in the first 12 verses of “The Acts of the Apostles”, a second letter by Dr. Luke, written to His Excellency, Theophilus, to share the fact that the story continues? Well he starts off simply by reminding Theophilus, that everything he needed to know about Jesus was in the 1st letter. His ministry, His teaching, His preparation of the the disciples who became the apostles. What's the difference? A disciple is a student. A disciple follows a teacher on conditions like these. I will go where you go. I will do what you tell me to do. I will learn. I will ask questions to learn more. I will not question your authority. I am bound to you. I am your student.

The word apostle means literally, one who is sent out. Commissioned. So an apostle is first of all a graduate. It doesn't mean one who has learned everything there is to learn. It does mean one has demonstrated faith...in this case faith in God, faith in Jesus as His Son, faith in the Holy Spirit who is the power of the ministry to which God has called us. Apostle's are sent out into the world. They spread the word. Teach it and preach it. They gather a following: a new crop of disciples. They are as individuals, men and women in whom people perceive the power and the presence of

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God. They are doing what they are doing because more than a career, or a living, or profit, they are committed to doing what Jesus, what God, what the Holy Spirit has called them to do. The 12 became the 11, and then the number grew.

The demonstration that they were and are for real is the continuance of assemblies of people who worship God, who follow, one who is clearly following Jesus, in whom the work of God's Spirit can be seen. By God's grace, I have been privileged to give birth to a church. I have seen resurrection in dying churches twice. We here have had good times, after a tough time. And I will tell you I do not and cannot beat my breast and say...I do great work. Not unless I want to end any progress we have experienced. God has done gracious work wherever I have been privileged to serve. We praise the name of Jesus for what we are able to share and share in. We experience the presence of God's Spirit as we continue to be given opportunity together. Luke is right. The work continues.

Luke explains that the disciples in becoming apostles were commanded by no one but the risen Lord Jesus to remain in Jerusalem. They were to wait there until they were baptized in the Holy Spirit of God. The gift of our Heavenly Father. The disciples, who were about to become apostles were like we are. They were not suddenly all knowing and perfect. Remember at the last Supper, Jesus is trying to ready them for the chaos and the pain the crucifixion would create. They wanted to discuss how power was going to be given to them in this new Kingdom of God. "Who will sit on your right and left hand?" Who is going to be prime minister in the Kingdom. And it is pretty clear as you read the gospel accounts, there was more than a little rivalry, even anger as the 11 or the 12 jockeyed for power. To use a hockey metaphor, there is

elbowing going on in the corners.

Here in Acts chapter 1 the disciples, the 11 have not forgotten that moment, or those moments. That is why they asked the risen Lord Jesus, “Are you about to restore the Kingdom of Israel?” They are about to ask once again how the power pie is going to be divided among them. There is an assumption that there are rewards, earthly rewards to be had.

Jesus did give them a reply. And it begins with a touch of rebuke. “It is not for you to know the times or the dates the Father has set by His own authority.” Jesus is saying, Guys we are not going to play that game. Point number one: forget about that. This is not about getting power in a worldly sense. This is not about getting wealthy in a worldly sense. Point two: “You will receive power, the power God wants you have when the Holy Spirit comes upon you.” Point three: “You will become my witnesses...witnesses of Jesus.” You are going to become responsible for everything Jesus taught you, and responsible for crediting Jesus for what you know and have seen.” And Point 4 is: Then, at that time following the baptism of the Holy Spirit, you will go out and share the gospel. You will share it in Jerusalem where you are. You will share it in places that are near, but require a journey to get there...that is the significance of Samaria. Near, but away from home. And you will in time and as led by the Spirit of God share the gospel to the ends of the earth...everywhere there are people who need to hear it. Again an apostle is one who has been sent out. Commissioned. Notice there is no talk of denominational polity here. This is the process whereby the church has nonetheless grown and spread throughout the nations of the world, and down through the centuries.

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Luke tells Theophilus, this was the last time they saw Jesus and they witnessed His ascension into Heaven. The disciples are standing looking up. Trying to see Jesus to the last possible second. “Suddenly two men dressed in white stood beside them.” Where are we? We are back to angels Theophilus. We are back to angels brothers and sisters in Christ. We are back to angels as the messengers of God urging men to take the next step. And what is the message these two angels carry? Remember why there are 2 of them. Sign of the truth. The message they bear is the truth. What is the message?

“Men of Galilee, why do you stand here looking up 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.” We learn where all this has taken place. They are on the mount of Olives. A couple of hundred yards from the Garden of Gethsemane. And everything the angels have said to them urges them to do a single thing. How does a journey begin? You take the first step, and then the next and then the next and so on. Standing on the Mount of Olives they can see the Temple in Jerusalem. It's just over there, across the valley. Probably as far as the River Road is from here. And so they take the first step. They return to the city of Jerusalem proper. Where they will do the hardest thing it is for us as people to do. They will wait. Jesus said do not leave Jerusalem. What does that mean. Wait in Jerusalem.

This second letter of Luke connects the dots. It connects the dots that lead from Easter to us and where we are and what we are doing. It connects the dots so that we can literally see, that with Jesus the beat goes on. Your story and my story are connected to the story of Jesus. And an important reality in that story

is the real presence of God, the Holy Spirit. And a second important reality and part of our experience in the Holy Spirit of God, is the presence of the church. And I am not talking about the Church as the emerging rival to the great Empires of the world. Peter, James, John, Paul, Luke, Matthew, Mark, John...they were not about rivalling the Roman Empire.

And yet here is a paradox. The message of the Book of Acts is this. An essential element of the journey of faith that follows Jesus, is the emerging of the church, an assembly of believers with whom we make the journey of faith, following Jesus. In fact if we suddenly lost the church, we would to be true to Jesus, as Lord and Redeemer, we would have to reinvent her. Some of the bravest souls we have ever known are people who have moved into our neighbourhoods and have chosen to take up with us. Some day, we might have to do the same. Because continuing to follow Jesus, involves us, and has to involve us, in assembling with other people who are trying to follow Jesus.

And the bottom line in Luke's second letter is to say something we have heard from the famous and dearly departed catcher of the New York Yankees, Yogi Berra. "It aint over till it's over."

Faith in Jesus takes us to the cross. Faith in Jesus takes us to the open tomb. Faith in Jesus regardless of where we are or when we are involves the challenge to take the next step of following Jesus. To live today in the grace of God and to go where the Spirit of God leads us tomorrow. And to do so in community with others who want to do the same thing.

Let us pray;

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Lord Jesus we give thanks for the church and the truth that this believing community we call the church has led us to you. Encouraged us in you. Prayed for us in your name. Assured us that we are not alone in the flesh, in time, nor when we appear to be by ourselves. We thank you for your Spirit present with us. We thank you for brothers and sisters who continue to remember us and encourage us over the years. Lord we thank you that in the name of Jesus...the beat goes on. In the time of the Father's choosing Lord we look to your coming among us. Amen