

LIVING HOPE
STUDY GUIDE:
BOOK OF ACTS

Acts 3 & 4:1-35

The
Church:
IN CHRIST ALONE



As the Church began to grow beyond Jerusalem, God used the followers of Jesus Christ: men and women filled with the Holy Spirit and a passion for the Gospel. Well before we read the stories of Paul, the apostle, we read of Peter's commitment to the spread of the Good News. This is the same disciple who denied he even knew Jesus when he was cornered and afraid. God called him and equipped him to be a significant influence in the spread of the Church. And the Church grew.

THE CRIPPLED BEGGAR

READ ACTS 3:1-10

Peter and John, on their way to the temple to pray, were interrupted by God, through a crippled beggar at the gate to the temple. Crippled beggars had little, if any, hope in living beyond abject poverty. Peter and John looked straight at him, saw his extreme need, and knew what they were called to do. They saw past their own limitations to their all-powerful God. "In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk" Peter said. The instant must have been overwhelming as strength returned to the beggar's ankles and feet. A miracle occurred, a miracle of healing. A miracle occurred IN THE NAME OF JESUS.

While all the onlookers at the temple stood amazed and speechless, Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, took that opportunity to present to them, Jesus Christ, "the Holy and Righteous", "the author of life", the one they had crucified. He even reminded them of God's covenant promises with Abraham with "Through your offspring all peoples on earth will be blessed." (3:25)

The ministry of Jesus Christ did not end at Calvary, or at the resurrection. It continued on and Peter spoke with passion and commitment.

- 1. When were you confronted with a distinct need and knew you were called to address it but wondered if you could?**
- 2. What do you learn about the work of the Holy Spirit as you read about Peter, a simple fisherman, one who denied Jesus and yet was eloquent in addressing the people?**

PETER & JOHN BEFORE THE SANHEDRIN

READ ACTS 4:1-21

The leaders of the Jewish temple were greatly disturbed with Peter and John's message and how earnestly the people were listening. They decided to do something about the spread of the Gospel. Peter and John were imprisoned and called to give an account before the Sanhedrin the next day. Standing before the Sanhedrin, a ruling group of seventy priests was no easy task. Pete and John were not afraid. The question they were asked will ring down through the ages. "By what power or what name did you do this?" The answer is powerful as well. "It is by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified but whom God raised from the dead." (4: 10) This was followed by a statement which reminds all of us who the Church is built on. We are reminded of all the things we are promised which can only happen in the name of Jesus: miracles, salvation, forgiveness, wholeness, peace and hope. Peter says: "Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved." (4: 12) The Sanhedrin heard but were afraid because they sensed the power of God in Peter and John. They had been with Jesus! They threatened them, ordering them to be silent and teach nothing "in the name of Jesus". The believers gathered with Peter and John and "raised their voices together in prayer to God." It is a beautiful prayer, a spontaneous prayer. It is like asking God to equip, guide, support the work of the Church. It is like praying "Make us people who do Your work in Your way."

1. What does the name, Jesus, mean to you? How does His name affect you from moment to moment?

2. Leading the church is a challenging calling. What can you do to support leadership in your congregation? Is it possible to challenge leadership in the name of Jesus? How?

THE CHURCH GREW

Rapid growth occurred as Peter and John and others shared the gospel. Persecution became part of the journey for disciples and apostles alike. Not everything was smooth sailing as many new believers learned how to be the Church of Jesus Christ. They soon discovered that when you walk and talk with Jesus and live for Him, the public will resent you rather than support you. The Church was not yet worldwide, but steadily growing. People of God shared their possessions because they were united in Jesus Christ. They were a community of the saved, the redeemed, not a community of the perfect or flawless. They soon discovered that the work of the Church was not limited to spreading the Gospel to the world. They also needed to care for every member in the growing church community. Some conflicts arose around the equitable distribution of food and care for all. Out of the conflict came good decisions made with wisdom and input from the congregation. The Church became organized so that everyone's needs could be met. This way the ministry of prayer and teaching God's word could flourish. God builds His Church His way.

1. What do you think the role of leadership in a congregation is today?

2. What gifts has God given you for blessing the Church and bringing Him glory?

3. Can you think of someone in the Church who might need to be drawn in, cared for or encouraged? What can you do?