

WEEKLY SERMON

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The word of God crossing cultures

On Easter Day last year, we tried an experiment in our morning service. In how many different languages could we as a congregation say: 'Christ is risen!' I think we got to 19 different languages.

It's great to be part of a church family that is increasingly diverse in culture. It's also a challenge, as we seek to be genuinely intercultural rather than expecting others to conform to 'the way we've always done things'.

A multi-coloured, multi-cultured church is exactly what the resurrection and ascension of Jesus has made a reality. 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' (Acts 1:8)

The last words of Jesus recorded by Luke are a promise of the power and presence of the Holy Spirit with the disciples in their proclamation of Jesus.

The word is growing. That is the great miracle of the book of Acts. It's the story of how God sends his Holy Spirit on a small and shell-shocked community gathered in one room in Jerusalem – and through them takes the message of the risen Jesus to the ends of the earth.

And Luke gives us little snapshot summaries of how the word is spreading. So in 6:7, he tells us 'the word of God spread' (see also 12:24 and 19:20)

The word is not stationary. It won't stay in Jerusalem. There's going to be a geographical expansion of the word that will take the message of Jesus to Judea, Samaria and to the ends of the earth.

What's so encouraging about this story is that God himself is the evangelist.

In today's lectionary reading, God's angel directs Philip to a desert road. God prepares the Ethiopian, who 'just happens' to be reading the suffering servant song of Isaiah 53 when Philip encounters him on the Gaza road. And from the conversation that follows God brings him to repentance and faith in Christ so that the only appropriate response is for him to be baptised.

The word is growing. Not through the apostles at this point in Acts – but rather through what someone has described as 'nameless amateur missionaries' who 'preached the word wherever they went' (Acts 8:4). May God raise up many more 'nameless amateur missionaries' in our generation to cross cultures with the good news of Jesus.

Rev Canon Andrew Raynes, Vicar of Blackburn Christ Church

HEALTHY CHURCHES TRANSFORMING COMMUNITIES