**Sermon 2/10/19**

**Acts 2:42—3:26**

Ludwig Nommensen traveled to begin mission work with a tribe in Southeast Asia.

The village chief welcomed Ludwig and said, "You have 2 years to learn our customs

          and convince us you have a message worth hearing."

After 2 years, the tribal leader asked the missionary how Christianity

differs from the moral rules and traditions of the tribe.

"We already know what is right," the chief explained. "We too have laws that say

we must not steal, or take our neighbor's wives, or tell lies."

The missionary replied,

“That's true. But my God supplies the power needed to keep those laws.”

This startled the chief. "Can you really teach my people to live better?"

"No, I can't," responded Ludwig. "But if they receive Jesus Christ,

God will give them the strength to do what is right."

The chief invited him to stay another 6 months, during which Ludwig preached the

          gospel and taught villagers how the Holy Spirit works in the lives of Christians.

"You can stay as long as you want," the chief finally announced.

"Your religion is better than ours, for your God walks with his people,

and gives them strength to do the things He requires."

Just before his ascension, Jesus told his followers:

**You will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you;**

**and you will be my** **witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria,**

**and to the ends of the earth.**

And his followers changed from a ragged bunch of frightened men, into people

          talking to large crowds, and preaching the Good News throughout the world.

In the book of Acts, everything fits into place as it gives a transition

from the life of Jesus to the new church.

It introduces Paul and explains how a minority religion crossed the sea to Rome,

the capital of the empire.

As we read the book of Acts we visit key cities sprinkled around the Mediterranean,

          we meet the principal leaders of the new movement,

and we get a strong sense of the problems which will occupy Paul's letters.

Luke, a physician, wrote the third Gospel as an account of all Jesus did and taught.

The book of Acts continues the story, hinting that this history, too,

will show Jesus at work, but in a quite different form.

Jesus promised:

**“I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it.”**

Acts graphically shows how the fulfillment of this promise began:

The first 7 chapters show the church in Jerusalem,

the next five focus on Judea and Samaria,

and the rest of the book

follows the spread of the gospel to the outposts of Roman civilization.

Due to Luke's writing skill, Acts reads like a novel,

skipping from one exhilarating scene to the next.

Wherever the apostles went, action swirled, riots erupted,

and a small church took root.

In an era when new religions were a dime a dozen,

the Christian faith became a worldwide phenomenon.

Acts reads like a well-written history.

It follows a logical plan, includes fascinating details,

and focuses on the most dramatic events.

The first 12 chapters concentrate mainly on the apostle Peter.

The rest of Acts features Paul.

Acts records a series of stages through which the Christian church

became a separate movement.

At this point, the followers of Jesus were still keeping the pattern of

traditional Jewish worship.

Yet this book shows them also developing a new form of "house churches"

based on communal sharing and fellowship.

They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to fellowship,

to the breaking of bread and to prayer.

Everyone was filled with awe at the many wonders and signs performed

by the apostles.

All the believers were together and had everything in common.

They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need.

Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts.

They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts,

          praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people.

And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.

But this is not simply a story which happened long, long ago,

          and has little meaning for us in the present time.

Their devotion to fellowship, and prayer, and the apostles’ teaching

          has continued to make a difference down through the centuries.

And will continue to make a difference in the future.

Back in the late 1700’s a British ship set sail from England bound for the South Seas.

The plan was that those on board would spend some time among the islands,

          transplanting fruit-bearing and food-bearing trees,

and doing anything they could to make the islands more habitable.

After ten months of sailing, the ship arrived safely at its destination.

For six months the officers and crew worked doing what they could

to improve living conditions for the natives.

When the special task was completed, however, and the order came to embark again,

          the sailors rebelled.

They had formed strong attachments for the native girls,

and the climate and the ease of the South Sea island life was enjoyable.

The result was mutiny.

The sailors placed the Captain and a few loyal men adrift in an open boat.

Miraculously, the Captain and sailors survived the ordeal,

were rescued, and eventually arrived in London to tell their story.

An expedition was launched to punish the mutineers,

and 14 of them were captured and paid the penalty under British law.

However, nine of the men had gone to another distant island.

There they organized a colony.

Perhaps there has never been a more immoral and decadent social life

than that of this island.

They learned to distill whiskey from a native plant.

The whiskey, as usual, along with other habits, led to their ruin.

Disease and murder took the lives of all the native men,

and all but one of the white men.

The survivor was Alexander Smith, who found himself the only man on an island,

          surrounded by a crowd of women and half-breed children.

Alexander Smith discovered a Bible among the possessions of a dead sailor.

The Book was new to him. He had never read it before.

He began to read it and continued until he had read all the way through.

He believed it and he began to live it.

He wanted others to share the story of the Bible,

so he read to the women and children every day.

It was 20 years before a ship ever found the island.

When it did, a miniature Utopia was discovered.

The people were living in decency, prosperity, harmony, and peace.

There was no crime, disease, immorality, insanity, or illiteracy.

All this was accomplished by reading, believing, and living, the truth of God.

The story of Acts is still our story today.

A community of those who believe can make a great difference.

Acts shows the disciples as they began to act like people

who had just witnessed the most astounding event in all history.

They couldn't wait to tell the world about it.

The scanty band of followers Jesus left behind was soon organizing and selecting

          leaders to handle the needs of a growing church.

Acts follows the core of leaders from place to place, as a remarkable drama unfolds.

A few men, mostly unlearned, were setting into motion a worldwide outreach

which would ultimately reshape civilization.

A revolution was underway, but not one with weapons.

This one was powered by the work of God, in simple people, who had seen a miracle.

Before long the Romans would exclaim: "See how they love one another."

All because, in the words of Peter:

“We cannot keep from speaking about what we have seen and heard.”

May we always be as devoted as these early followers.

**AMEN**