

Jerusalem: Transformative Community

Thomas Robinson, Cities of Hope 1, May 22, 2016

Acts 2:37-47

³⁷ Now when they heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and to the other apostles, “Brothers, what should we do?”

³⁸ Peter said to them, “**Change your thinking**, and let each of you **be plunged in water** upon the **name of Jesus Messiah** for **forgiveness** of your wrongs; and you will receive the **gift of the Holy Spirit**. ³⁹ For the **promise** is for **you**, for **your children**, and for **all who are far away**, as many as the **Lord our God** calls to him.” ⁴⁰ And he testified with many other words and exhorted them, saying, “**Be delivered** from this *twisted generation*.”

⁴¹ So **those who welcomed his word** were **plunged** in water, and that day about **three thousand** people (souls) were **added**. ⁴² They **devoted themselves to the teaching of the apostles** and to the **shared life**, to the **breaking of the bread** and to the **prayers**. ⁴³ But an **awe** (fear) came to every person (soul), and many **wonders** and **signs** happened through the apostles. ⁴⁴ All who **believed** were **together** and held **all things as shared**; ⁴⁵ they began selling their possessions and goods and distributing them to all, as anyone had need.

⁴⁶ Day by day, both by **devoting themselves with one heart** in the temple and by **breaking bread in their various houses**, they **shared** their food with **celebration** and **sincerity of heart**, ⁴⁷ **praising God** and having **grace toward all the people**. And day by day **the Lord** was **adding** those who were being **delivered** to the number of **those together**.

Luke 19:41-44 Jesus approaches Jerusalem at Passover time

⁴¹ When he drew near and saw the city, he wept over it, ⁴² saying, “If only you knew, even this day, the things that make for peace! But now they are hidden from your eyes. ⁴³ For the days will come upon you, when your enemies will ... ⁴⁴ tear you down to the ground, you and your children within you. And they will not leave one stone upon another in you, because you did not know the time of your visitation.”

Deuteronomy 32:5-6 Moses speaks of the corruption of humanity. (cf. Ps 77:8; Phil 2:15)

⁵ They have dealt corruptly with God; they are no longer his children; ... they are a crooked and twisted generation. ⁶ Do you thus repay the LORD, you foolish ... people? Is not he your father, who created you?

Acts 4:33-35 The community lives with resurrection grace and cares for those in need.

³³ And with great power the apostles were giving their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all. ³⁴ There was *not a needy person among them* (Dt 15:4), for many who were owners of lands or houses sold them and brought the proceeds of what was sold ³⁵ and laid it at the apostles’ feet, and it was distributed to each as any had need.

Acts 6:1, 8-9 Jerusalem begins the spread of the Faith among Greek-speakers.

¹ Now in these days when the disciples were multiplying, a complaint by the Greek-speakers (Hellenists) arose against the Hebrew-speakers because their widows were being neglected in the daily distribution....

⁸ And Stephen, full of grace and power, was doing great wonders and signs among the people. ⁹ Then some of those who belonged to the synagogue of the Freedmen (as it was called), and of the Cyrenians, and of the Alexandrians, and of those from Cilicia and Asia, rose up and disputed with Stephen.

Acts 15:1-2 In Jerusalem the leaders recognize that God wants Gentiles included.

¹ Some came from Judea and were teaching, “Unless you are circumcised according to Moses, you cannot be delivered.” ² And after Paul and Barnabas had no small ... debate with them, Paul and Barnabas and some others were appointed to go up to Jerusalem to the apostles and the elders about this question.

From Jerusalem to Rome – Hope among City Crowds

Though Jesus came from a village, the Faith in him spread from city to city across the Roman empire. The Spirit came at Pentecost among the crowds gathered from far and wide. The messengers of this new hope, love, understanding of God and life in Jesus took their announcement into the meeting places and markets of Jerusalem, Rome, and far beyond.

Crowds are 'dumb and panicky' (MiB), a person is smart. On Pentecost Peter spoke in the court of the great Jerusalem Temple to the persons who had been part of the crowd that crucified Jesus. When they listened to the promise of scripture in Prophets and Psalms, they realized one by one that they had rejected the very Messiah (anointed King) they hoped for.

He called them to transformation: changed thinking, a decisive plunge one by one into a new life given by Jesus, into the power of God's Holy Spirit, into a new community, not a crowd.

Jerusalem, a City of Promise and Disaster

Since David conquered Jerusalem and Solomon built the Temple there, the city had been center of the people's hopes and mistakes. Northern tribes broke away and were ultimately conquered and dispersed. Southern tribes had some good rulers but more bad ones and suffered exile.

They returned full of hope but also under pagan rule. They hoped for deliverance and Messiah. Under Rome, some sold out. Zealots wanted military revolution. Rome was central in both visions. Either lose identity (as High priests! often did) or drive out the foreigner for a 'pure' nation.

Jesus called them to new vision, to follow God in loving even foreigners— promise to Abram. Jesus was crucified. Jerusalem and Rome had ever more conflict. War broke out in 66, and Rome destroyed Jerusalem and the Temple in 70. War came again in 132: Jerusalem obliterated. Luke is likely writing in the period after 70 when the way of violence had brought disaster. In 30, Peter told the people of God's Spirit poured out on all, calling even those far off. He learns.

Turning from Death to Life, from Exclusion to Inclusion

Jerusalem becomes the starting point for deliverance from the 'twisted generation' of violence and exclusion. There is not a hint of revenge. But the humility of receiving God's grace.

"Change your thinking" (repent). Commit yourself (plunge in water) to the Messiah you crucified but God raised to new life. You become a community conscious of its own vast sins but receiving unearned forgiveness by God's grace: no triumph over others, only joy. Receive the unimaginable gift of God's own Spirit living in you. Realize it's for everyone.

The Jerusalem community learned that implementing these realities was challenging. Even among Jews, language barriers could cause conflict. Different cultural contexts interpreted Jesus' meaning in different ways. The Greek-speaking Jews were more radical and more defensive. They laid the groundwork for ultimately including even Gentiles in the community.

Together – Sharing Transformation by Jesus

Luke shows the building of a community based on this new way of thinking, committed to Jesus, inclusive, forgiven, empowered by the Spirit – strangers united in a family of God's promise. Teaching. Everyone had a lot to learn and knew it. Thinking in radically new ways of Jesus is not easy for any of us. There are simple beginnings but challenging depths. We're all still learning.

Shared life. Meals, conversation, friendship, helping those in need. Creating a family where there can be freedom with each other, no masks, real concern for needs, shared resources.

Breaking the Bread. Living in the shared story of Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection. Sharing the story concretely with each other. Being shaped by Jesus in mind, heart, action, love, joy.

Prayers. A real and deepening life with God. Awe before his love and welcome. Celebration of grace.