

Rev. Dr. Chris Montovino
Luke 24:50-53; Acts 1:1-11
May 3, 2026

Introduction to Acts

As many of you know, after today I'll be stepping away for a sabbatical through May, June, and July. And it felt right—almost natural—that as I step away, we step forward in Scripture. We move from Luke's Gospel, the story of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection... into Acts, which is really the story of what happens next.

Because Acts is about the continuation of Jesus' ministry—through ordinary people... empowered by the Holy Spirit... becoming what we now call the Church.

And in a strange way, that makes this a fitting moment for us. Because just as those first disciples had to figure out who they were without Jesus physically present... we get a chance, in a small way, to reflect on who we are and how we live out our faith when our routines shift a bit.

Now don't worry—this is not a test. I'm not assigning homework while I'm gone.

But I am inviting reflection.

Now this is not our first sabbatical rodeo. But I realize that for some of us who have not experienced a pastoral sabbatical I thought I'd take some time at the end of today's service to field any questions you might have.

But before we go any further, I'd like us to watch the first of two brief videos which give an overview of The Bible Projects' understanding of Luke's Book of Acts. Watch this.

<https://bibleproject.com/videos/acts-1-12/>

Now as we dive into the weeds, we begin our exploration of Acts by starting with the end of Luke 24:50-53 and then moving on to Acts 1:1-11.

Luke 24:50-53

50 Jesus led his disciples out to the area near Bethany. Then he lifted up his hands and blessed them. **51** While he was blessing them, he left them. He was taken up into heaven. **52** Then they worshiped him. With great joy, they returned to Jerusalem. **53** Every day they went to the temple, praising God.

Acts 1:1-11

1 Theophilus, I wrote about Jesus in my earlier book. I wrote about all he did and taught **2** until the day he was taken up to heaven. Before Jesus left, he gave orders to the apostles he had chosen. He did this through the Holy Spirit. **3** After his suffering and death, he appeared to them. In many ways he proved that he was alive. He appeared to them over a period of 40 days. During that time he spoke

about God’s kingdom. **4** One day Jesus was eating with them. He gave them a command. “Do not leave Jerusalem,” he said. “Wait for the gift my Father promised. You have heard me talk about it. **5** John baptized with water. But in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.”

6 Then the apostles gathered around Jesus and asked him a question. “Lord,” they said, “are you going to give the kingdom back to Israel now?”

7 He said to them, “You should not be concerned about times or dates. The Father has set them by his own authority. **8** But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you. Then you will tell people about me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria. And you will even tell other people about me from one end of the earth to the other.”

9 After Jesus said this, he was taken up to heaven. The apostles watched until a cloud hid him from their sight.

10 While he was going up, they kept on looking at the sky. Suddenly two men dressed in white clothing stood beside them. **11** “Men of Galilee,” they said, “why do you stand here looking at the sky? Jesus has been taken away from you into heaven. But he will come back in the same way you saw him go.”

Let us pray.

We begin at the very end of Luke and the very beginning of Acts. Jesus blesses his disciples... and then ascends into heaven. And in Acts, as he did in his gospel, Luke addresses someone named Theophilus.

Now, we don’t know exactly who Theophilus was. Some think he was a Roman official. Others think he was a real person funding Luke’s work. But here’s what we do know: the name “Theophilus” means “friend of God.”

Which means, in a very real sense... Luke is writing to anyone who would claim that identity.

So, let me ask you—have you ever thought of yourself that way?

Not just a believer. Not just a churchgoer.

But a friend of God?

Because if that’s true... then Acts isn’t just their story.

It’s our story and one that we invited to live into.

Now here’s the first instruction Jesus gives in Acts:

“Do not leave Jerusalem... but wait.”

Wait. That’s it. That’s the big command. And honestly, that might be one of the hardest commands in all of Scripture. We don’t like waiting. We are not a waiting people.

We are a microwave, high-speed internet, “why is this taking longer than 3 seconds?” kind of culture. I mean, if a webpage takes too long to load, we don’t wait—we assume it’s broken, push refresh, and then get mad at the Wi-Fi.

And yet Jesus says: wait.

Don’t rush ahead. Don’t force it. Don’t try to manufacture something on your own.

Wait for the gift. Wait for the Spirit.

Because what comes next cannot be powered by our own effort—it must be powered by God.

But the disciples... well... they do what we often do.

They change the subject. “Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?” Translation: “Okay, but what’s the plan? What’s the timeline? Are we back on track now?” They’re still holding onto old expectations. Their old vision of how things should go.

And Jesus gently redirects them.

“It’s not for you to know the times or dates... BUT...there’s the big transition that tells us that God is about to do something big...BUT... you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you... and you will be my witnesses...”

And then he lays out this pattern:

Jerusalem.

Judea.

Samaria.

The ends of the earth.

Sound familiar? That’s our mission. To be faithful witnesses in each of those spheres—starting close, and moving outward.

Like a stone dropped into a still pond... the ripples begin at the center and move outward. It starts at home. With the people closest to us. Then moves out to our neighbors. Then the people who are different from us... or, if we’re being honest, the people we might rather avoid. And then beyond... to people and places we may never even see.

So here are the real questions:

What kind of witness am I at home? Do the people closest to me see Jesus in me... or just see me? What kind of neighbor am I? Especially to that neighbor—you know the one. The one with the loud music, the unkept yard... or the dog with boundary issues. And what about the people who are different from me? Do I move toward them... or around them?

Because Jesus didn’t say, “Wait until you feel comfortable.”

He said, “You will receive power... and you will be my witnesses.”

I was reminded of this recently at a memorial service for a pastor friend, Bruce Armstrong. Bruce wasn’t famous. He didn’t lead a massive church. There

were no books, no podcasts, no conference tours. But what he did have... was a witness of a life well lived that pointed to Jesus.

Story after story after story—of quiet faithfulness, of love, of presence. And I found myself wondering... what will people say about me someday?

Not, “Wow, he gave great sermons.”

Not, “He had a really efficient church calendar.”

Not, “He created great programs that attracted the multitudes.”

But hopefully something simpler.

That I loved Jesus.

That I loved people well.

And that I gave it my best shot even if I let people down.

Honestly... that feels like enough. I’ll take that!

Then comes this incredible moment—Jesus ascends, and the disciples are just standing there, staring up into the sky.

You can almost picture it. Mouths open. Completely awestruck.

And suddenly—two men in white appear. Angels. And they ask, “Why do you stand here looking into the sky?” In other words: “What are you doing? There’s work to be done.”

Don’t get stuck staring upward when God has called you outward.

Don’t be so focused on heaven... that you miss what God wants to do right here on earth.

And here’s the good news in all of this.

Jesus didn’t leave them empty-handed. He said, “It is good that I am going away... because the Holy Spirit will come.”¹ Which means the presence of God is no longer limited to one place, one time, one person. It now lives in us.

And look what has happened because of that. The Church has spread across the world. Billions upon billions of lives have been changed. Hospitals built. Schools founded. Justice pursued. Yes, there have been failures too. Real ones. Painful ones. But even through that... God has not abandoned his Church.

And he’s not abandoning us.

So as I step away for a season... the question isn’t, “What happens while Pastor Chris is gone?”

The question is: Who are we becoming? Who are you becoming? Because the same Spirit that empowered the early Church... is alive and active here.

Not because of me. Not because of what I do around here. But because of Jesus in you. I leave in peace, confident of how I see Jesus in you.

And so we come to this communion table today.

It is a reminder.

¹ John 16:7

That Jesus has died.
That Jesus is risen.
That Jesus will come again.
That Jesus is still present with us.
And that Jesus still has more work to do through us to reach the world.
Even now. Even here. Even as we are apart for a little while.
Let's pray. Amen.