

**WITNESSING TO JESUS AS THE
LORD-MESSIAH, SERVANT-SON,
REJECTED AND GLORIFIED SAVIOUR**

ACTS 2:14 - 4:37

¹⁴But Peter, standing with the eleven, raised his voice and addressed them, 'Men of Judea and all who live in Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and listen to what I say.

¹⁵Indeed, these are not drunk, as you suppose, for it is only nine o'clock in the morning.

¹⁶No, this is what was spoken through the prophet Joel [2:28-32]:

¹⁷In the last days it will be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams.

¹⁸Even upon my slaves, both men and women, in those days I will pour out my Spirit; and they shall prophesy. ¹⁹And I will show portents in the heaven above and signs on the earth below, blood, and fire, and smoky mist. ²⁰The sun shall be turned to darkness and the moon to blood, before the coming of the Lord's great and glorious day.

²¹Then everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.'

The Twelve stand together, with Peter as their spokesman. Though his audience comes from many nations, thus symbolising the universality of God's saving design, they are Jews. Peter is about to begin carrying out the commission given to the apostles by Jesus: they are to witness to Jesus, 'beginning from Jerusalem' (Luke 24:47). Like Moses (see Exodus 15:26), he calls on them to 'listen'; that is to say to attend to what they are experiencing and to reflect upon it in order to discover what it is that God is revealing.

Peter is reaching out to his Jewish brothers and sisters with the hope of inviting them to see in Jesus the fulfilment of their most cherished hopes. It comes as no surprise that he turns to the sacred scriptures, hoping to persuade them to see new meanings in these rich texts in the light of the experience of God's Spirit that is evident to them. Nor is it surprising that he should choose a passage that speaks of the outpouring of the Spirit. However, there are two further points that must not be overlooked. The Exodus from Egypt was celebrated in Jewish ritual as a great and glorious 'Day of the Lord', for on that day God was revealed as the one who hears the cry of the oppressed and delivers them from all that is holding them in bondage (see Exodus 3:7-8). On that 'day' the Lord, the God of mercy and compassion, liberated them through Moses, formed them into a people, made a covenant with them, and promised them a land. Peter wants his Jewish audience to recognise this Pentecost as 'the Lord's great and glorious day', the day of 'the Son of Man' (Luke 17:24), and so to see God's final judgment as one of communion and liberation.

Secondly, Peter selects Joel, because of God's promise to pour out his Spirit upon '*all flesh*', and that '*everyone* who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved'. Peter is inviting all his Jewish brothers and sisters to call on the name of the Lord and be saved. He will go on to identify the Lord as Jesus (see also 7:59; 9:14,21; 22:16).

Peter reminds the 'Israelites' of 'the deeds of power, wonders and signs that God did through Jesus of Nazareth' (see Luke's Gospel), and about their handing him over to the Gentile authorities to be crucified (see Luke 23:1-25). Even in this, Luke wants us to discern 'the definite plan and foreknowledge of God'. On the level of human activity, the level of cause and effect, we have a story of sin, a story of injustice, a story of human failure to listen to God and to obey God's will. We are challenged, however, to rise above the human plain in order to gaze upon the unchanging fidelity of God, revealed, not in the human sin of crucifying Jesus, but in the faithful love of the one being crucified. God's will is seen in the outpouring of the Spirit, which points in turn to the fact that Jesus of Nazareth is alive, beyond death. It is his Spirit that they are witnessing, powerfully acting in their midst to share with them his life.

What they are experiencing is a sign that 'God raised him up'. Once again, Peter calls upon sacred scripture to show that what God has done for Jesus should not come as a surprise (see also 13:35). It is consistent with what God has already revealed through his inspired prophet, David (Psalm 16:8-11). The new event of the outpouring from heaven of the Spirit of Jesus reveals a new meaning in the sacred text. Jesus is the 'Holy One', for he has received the fullness of the Holy Spirit and lives in intimate communion with the all-Holy God (see Isaiah 6:3; Psalm 99:3,5).

Peter is also presenting Jesus as the promised Messiah. God is, indeed, 'restoring the kingdom to Israel' (1:6) through Jesus who has been 'taken up to heaven' (1:2). Enthroned as king in God's presence, he is pouring out on the world the powerful, saving, Spirit of God. This is cause for joy. We recall the joy experienced at Jesus' conception (Luke 1:47) and the 'good news of great joy for all the people' (Luke 2:10) at his birth – a joy meant for 'all who were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem' (Luke 2:38).

²²You that are Israelites, listen to what I have to say: Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested to you by God with deeds of power, wonders, and signs that God did through him among you, as you yourselves know —

²³this man, handed over to you according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of those outside the law.

²⁴But God raised him up, having freed him from death, because it was impossible for him to be held in its power.

²⁵For David says concerning him 'I saw the Lord always before me, for he is at my right hand so that I will not be shaken; ²⁶therefore my heart was glad, and my tongue rejoiced; moreover my flesh will live [fix its tent] in hope. ²⁷For you will not abandon my soul to Hades, or let your Holy One experience corruption. ²⁸You have made known to me the ways of life; you will make me full of gladness with your presence.'[Psalm 16:8-11]

²⁹Fellow Israelites, I may say to you confidently of our ancestor David that he both died and was buried, and his tomb is with us to this day. ³⁰Since he was a prophet, he knew that God had sworn with an oath to him that he would put one of his descendants on his throne (see Psalm 132:11-18).

³¹Foreseeing this, David spoke of the resurrection of the Messiah, saying,

'He was not abandoned to Hades, nor did his flesh experience corruption.'

[Psalm 16:10]

³²This Jesus God raised up, and of that all of us are witnesses.

³³Being therefore exalted at the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he has poured out this that you both see and hear. ³⁴For David did not ascend into the heavens, but he himself says,

'The Lord said to my Lord, "Sit at my right hand,

³⁵until I make your enemies your footstool."'[Psalm 110:1]

³⁶Therefore let the entire house of Israel know with certainty that God has made him both Lord and Messiah, this Jesus whom you crucified.'

The claim of the disciples that Jesus is the promised Messiah is here made explicit, again with reference to the psalms. That Jesus is truly alive is the reason for the outpouring of the Spirit which they are witnessing. He is alive because God raised him from the dead, and in this the Jews are invited to see a fuller meaning in familiar texts. Jesus' final words to the apostles were:

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.

– Acts 1:8

Peter and the other apostles who are standing with him (see 2:14) are already beginning to carry this out: 'of that all of us are witnesses'. The argument begins always with experience: 'this that you both see and hear'. Peter's claim is that this extraordinary outpouring of the Spirit promised by the Father (see 1:4) comes from the one 'whom you crucified', who is now, as David had said, 'exalted at the right hand of God'. God's saving power is being exercised by him whom 'God has made both Lord and Messiah'.

Gone are the hesitations which we find in the Gospel about applying to Jesus the title 'Messiah' ('Anointed One', 'Christ'). Jesus' death on the cross put an end to any possibility of his being confused with the political understanding attached to the term by many of his contemporaries. Only now, through being raised from death to life by God, has Jesus been definitively 'enthroned'. The proof of this is in the powerful, healing, liberating and life-giving Spirit which they are witnessing. From his place 'at the right hand' of God, Jesus is now able to fulfil the most profound hopes placed in the Messiah, but in a way that transcended people's previous expectations.

Paul will attempt to persuade his Jewish brothers and sisters that 'Jesus is the Messiah' (9:22). He has the same message in Antioch in Pisidia (see 13:32-34), in Thessalonica (see 17:3) and in Corinth (see 18:5). Luke ends *Acts* in Rome with Paul 'proclaiming the kingdom of God and teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ with all boldness and without hindrance' (28:31).

The title 'Lord' has a range of meanings. It is a title of respect. Jesus is addressed in this way a number of times in the Gospel (see Luke 5:12; 6:46; 9:54; 10:17; 22:33). When applied to the Messiah, the focus is on the power of the king rather than on his being anointed (the 'Christ'). It is in the context of a question about the kingdom that the apostles address the risen Jesus as 'Lord' (see 1:6). Now that he has been raised to life by God and enthroned at God's right hand, he is 'Lord of all'(10:36).

However, as already mentioned in relation to Luke's Prologue, the title 'Lord' is used of God as Saviour. The Lord is God who appeared to Moses in the burning bush and who sent Moses to liberate the people from slavery in Egypt. It is this mysterious and divine aspect that is highlighted by Luke in his Prologue. Elizabeth greets Mary as 'the mother of my Lord'(Luke 1:43). At his birth, he is proclaimed as 'a Saviour, who is the Messiah, the Lord'(Luke 2:11).

Peter has just quoted from the prophet Joel: 'Everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord will be saved'(2:21). He is here identifying this 'Lord' as Jesus, the risen and exalted Christ. Jesus is being identified with God as Saviour. To have God's name is to exercise God's power (see Exodus 23:20-21). Peter is claiming that in exercising kingly power, Jesus is the one through whom God has chosen to save. He will go on to say: 'There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among mortals by which we must be saved'(4:32). Peter is telling the Jews that the powerful outpouring of the Holy Spirit which they are witnessing is a statement by God that he has chosen to carry out his saving action through the man Jesus (2:22). Paul expresses the same truth when he writes: 'in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself'(2Corinthians 5:19). Let us recall the words of a Christian hymn, quoted by Paul in his letter to the Philippians:

Christ Jesus, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death — even death on a cross. Therefore God also highly exalted him and gave him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

– Philippians 2:6-11

The apostle Peter, in communion with the eleven, is here addressing the Jews in Jerusalem. We find much the same points being made by Paul in the opening words of his letter to the Gentiles in Rome:

Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God, which he promised beforehand through his prophets in the holy scriptures, the gospel concerning his Son, who was descended from David according to the flesh and was declared to be Son of God with power according to the spirit of holiness by resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord, through whom we have received grace and apostleship to bring about the obedience of faith among all the Gentiles for the sake of his name.

– Romans 1:1-5

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

³⁸Peter said to them, 'Repent, and be baptised every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ so that your sins may be forgiven; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.'

³⁹For the promise is for you, for your children, and for all who are far away [Isaiah 57:19], every-one whom the Lord our God calls to him.'

⁴⁰And he testified with many other arguments and exhorted them, saying, 'Save yourselves from this corrupt generation.'

⁴¹So those who welcomed his message were baptised, and that day about three thousand persons were added.

Having heard Peter, the people are 'cut to the heart' and ask: 'What should we do?' This same question was asked of John the Baptist (see Luke 3:10,12,14). Peter's answer picks up that of the Baptist who 'proclaimed a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins' (Luke 3:3), and who also promised that the one more powerful than he and of whom he was the herald would 'baptise you with the Holy Spirit and with fire' (Luke 3:16). Relevant also are Jesus' instructions to his apostles (see Luke 24:47).

Out of respect it was customary not to pronounce the name of the Lord (YHWH) when addressing God. They would sometimes say 'the Lord'. They would sometimes say 'the Name'. Peter is telling them that it is God's will that they call upon Jesus, acknowledging him as the Messiah: the one who fulfils for them all the hopes and aspirations of their race; the one in whom God is fulfilling his promises to them. They are to acknowledge him as Lord: as the one through whom God offers to redeem and to save. If they welcome the gift of the Holy Spirit they will experience Jesus' own intimate communion with the Father. They are to cling to Jesus by committing themselves to be 'added' to the community of Jesus' disciples and witnesses.

They should not be like their ancestors, a stubborn and rebellious generation, a generation whose heart was not steadfast, whose spirit was not faithful to God.

– Psalm 78:8

The faithful and merciful God is calling them and their children. Indeed God's call goes out to the whole world, according to God's promise:

Peace, peace, to the far and the near, says the Lord; and I will heal them.

– Isaiah 57:19

In the Greek version of the Bible, the Septuagint (LXX), the verse in Joel immediately after the text quoted by Peter reads: 'In Jerusalem there will be a remnant, just as the Lord said, and those whom the Lord summons will have the good news proclaimed to them' (Joel 3:5).

In the light of the witness given to Jesus by the apostles, three thousand persons 'listened' (2:14) and repented. Amazement and astonishment (see 2:7) have brought them to a desire to welcome for themselves 'the promise of the Father' (1:4): the outpouring from the risen Jesus of God's saving Spirit.

In this summary passage, Luke expresses the essential elements of living in a Christian community (see commentary on 1:4). To live these elements requires a ‘day by day’ perseverance (Greek *proskartereō*) translated here as ‘devoted themselves’ (2:42) and ‘spent much time’ (2:46)]. The fruit of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on what Luke has called ‘the Lord’s great and glorious day’ (2:20) is to be realised over and over each day in the Christian community. In Jewish tradition there are three pillars supporting the community of faith. The first is the Torah, which concerns the spirit; the second is the cult, which concerns the soul; and the third is works of mercy, which concern the body.

In Luke’s account, corresponding to the Torah is ‘the apostles’ teaching’. Luke will give us a number of examples of the community listening to this teaching (see 6:1-7; 11:1-18; 15:30-35; 20:7-12,17-35). Through their teaching the apostles are witnessing to Jesus. Corresponding to works of mercy is ‘fellowship’ (Greek: *koinōnia*; compare Galatians 2:9). In relation to God, Christians have a shared faith (2:44), and a shared prayer (2:46; see 1:14,24; 4:24-30; 6:4,6; 12:5,12; 13:2; 16:25;20:36; 21:5,14). This fellowship brings them ‘together’ in two senses: they are gathered in one place (Greek: *epi to auto*, 2:44; see also 1:15; 2:1,47; 1Corinthians 11:20; 14:23); and they are of one mind and heart (Greek: *homothumadon*, 2:46; see 1:14). In fellowship they put whatever they have at the disposal of the community, with a view especially to helping the poor (see 6:1-7; 11:27-30). In this way they are a sign to the world of the love of God to which Jesus himself witnessed during his life on earth.

Corresponding to cult are the public worship in the temple (compare Luke 24:53), and the breaking of bread in the home (see 20:7). In this latter they encounter the risen Jesus and enjoy communion with him and with each other in a special way (see Luke 24:35). It is a meal celebrating the covenant (Luke 22:19-20; compare Exodus 24:5-8,11).

The Christian community life causes ‘awe’ to come ‘upon everyone’, for in it people can see revealed the wonderful grace of God’s liberating and saving love. More and more are ‘being saved’ (compare 1Corinthians 1:18), that is, they are experiencing the presence in their lives of the Spirit of Jesus (see 2:21).

⁴²They devoted themselves

to the apostles’ teaching

and fellowship,

to the breaking of bread

and the prayers.

⁴³Awe came upon everyone, because many wonders and signs were being done by the apostles.

⁴⁴All who believed were together and had all things in common;

⁴⁵they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need.

⁴⁶Day by day, as they spent much time together in the temple, they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts,

⁴⁷praising God and having the goodwill of all the people.

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

¹One day Peter and John were going up to the temple at the hour of prayer, at three o'clock in the afternoon. ²And a man lame from birth was being carried in. People would lay him daily at the gate of the temple called the Beautiful Gate so that he could ask for alms from those entering the temple.

³When he saw Peter and John about to go into the temple, he asked them for alms. ⁴Peter looked intently at him, as did John, and said, 'Look at us.' ⁵And he fixed his attention on them, expecting to receive something from them. ⁶But Peter said, 'I have no silver or gold, but what I have I give you; in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, stand up and walk.'

⁷And he took him by the right hand and raised him up; and immediately his feet and ankles were made strong. ⁸Jumping up, he stood and began to walk, and he entered the temple with them, walking and leaping and praising God.

Peter and John head the list of apostles (1:13). According to Jesus' instruction, the apostles are to go ahead of Jesus in pairs (Luke 10:1; see Luke 22:8). This highlights the fact that what they are doing is not due to their personal abilities. They are on mission as ambassadors of Jesus.

The two apostles, as devout Jews, are going into the temple (see 2:46) at the hour of the evening sacrifice. It is also the hour of Jesus' death (see Luke 23:44). If the 'Beautiful Gate' is the gate known also as the Nicanor Gate, it was the entrance into the Court of Women from the Court of Gentiles. It was remarkable for its doors of Corinthian bronze. The apostles encounter a lame man. Being lame, he was considered 'impure' and so was among those excluded from entering the temple (see Leviticus 21:18; also Luke 7:22; 14:13,21). He can only beg for alms at the entrance.

We are told later that he is 'over forty years old' (4:22). He is a symbol of the people of Israel, unable to enter the promised land during forty years of wandering in the wilderness. Though the Jews did return from exile in Babylon, they were still not free and so were awaiting their full return, led by the Messiah. It is Jesus of Nazareth the Messiah, through Peter and John, who makes it possible for him to enter into God's house of prayer (see Luke 19:45-46), demonstrating in this way that the kingdom has indeed been restored to Israel (1:6).

Peter takes him by the right hand, reminding us of the man with the withered right hand who was cured by Jesus (see Luke 6:6). He sought to receive; now he is able to give. He sought for alms (the Greek word for alms, *eleēmosunē*, includes the word for mercy); in his abundant mercy, Jesus receives him into the sanctuary of divine communion. Now, indeed, is the prophecy of Isaiah fulfilled:

Strengthen the weak hands, and make firm the feeble knees. Say to those who are of a fearful heart, 'Be strong, do not fear! Here is your God ... He will come and save you.' ... Then the lame shall leap like a deer.

– Isaiah 35:3-6

The people's response mirrors that of those who witnessed Jesus' powerful words commanding the demons (see Luke 4:36), and the astonishing catch of fish (see Luke 5:9). Peter and John were among those who were told by Jesus that their catch of people would be just as astonishing (Luke 5:10). We are seeing that promise fulfilled here.

**⁹All the people saw him walking and praising God,
¹⁰and they recognized him as the one who used to sit and ask for alms at the Beautiful Gate of the temple; and they were filled with wonder and amazement at what had happened to him.**

God's suffering servant has been raised to life

¹¹While he clung to Peter and John, all the people ran together to them in the portico called Solomon's Portico, utterly astonished.

¹²When Peter saw it, he addressed the people, 'You Israelites, why do you wonder at this, or why do you stare at us, as though by our own power or piety we had made him walk?'

¹³The God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, the God of our ancestors has glorified his servant Jesus, whom you handed over and rejected in the presence of Pilate, though he had decided to release him.

¹⁴But you rejected the Holy and Righteous One and asked to have a murderer given to you,

¹⁵and you killed the Author [Initiator] of life, whom God raised from the dead.

To this we are witnesses.

¹⁶And by faith in his name, his name itself has made this man strong, whom you see and know; and the faith that is through Jesus has given him this perfect health in the presence of all of you.

For astonishment to mature into faith (see 4:4), it is necessary that someone witness to the profound meaning of the event that has been experienced. They have seen a man being healed, liberated and welcomed into the assembly where he can 'praise God'. Peter witnesses to Jesus as the one who is restoring the kingdom of God to Israel, as earlier he witnessed to Jesus as the one pouring out the Spirit: 'the God of our ancestors has glorified his servant Jesus.'

To speak of Jesus as God's 'servant' is to choose a title full of rich significance for a Jew. It is a title used of Abraham (Psalm 105:6,42) because of his faithful obedience to God. Likewise, Moses (Deuteronomy 34:5), David (Psalm 89:3; see Luke 1:69; Acts 4:25) and the prophets (Jeremiah 7:25). Especially significant is its use in the exilic writings of the scroll of Isaiah (Isaiah 42, 49, 50, 52-53), where God's servant perseveres in humble obedience to the mission given him by God, even through suffering and rejection.

Peter reminds the people of their rejection of Jesus (compare 2:36). Jesus is the 'Holy One' (see 2:27; Luke 1:35; 4:34), because of the intimacy of his communion with the all-holy God, and because he has been set aside to draw everyone into this same holiness. He is 'the Righteous One' (see Luke 23:47), because of his perfect obedience to God's will.

The restoring of the lame man to health and to the community is living witness to the fact that Jesus, God's true servant, the 'Initiator of life' (see 5:31) whom they killed, has been 'raised by God from the dead', 'the first to rise from the dead' (26:23). He is the suffering and rejected servant who has been 'glorified' by God.

Peter speaks of God in terms taken from the encounter between Moses and God at the burning bush (see Exodus 3:6; see also Luke 20:37-38). Jesus is the one whom God has chosen to be his perfect servant and it is Jesus who offers true and complete liberation to all who, like the lame man, have faith in him and who receive faith through him. Those who welcome such a grace will, like the lame man, 'cling' to those who witness to Jesus.

Luke touches here on the important link between salvation and faith. Faith is essential because salvation consists in communion in the life of God. Since God is love, the offer of salvation respects our freedom to welcome or to reject. To reject God's offer is to remain obstinate in our sinful pride. To welcome it is to 'be-lieve'(to 'be-in-love'). It is when Jesus sees the faith of the paralysed man and his friends, that he is able to say: 'Friend, your sins are forgiven you'(Luke 5:20). Jesus is amazed at the faith of the centurion, a faith which opened him and his slave to the healing power of grace (see Luke 7:9-10). To the sinful woman who anointed his feet in the home of Simon the Pharisee, Jesus says: 'Your faith has saved you; go in peace'(Luke 7:50). He speaks in the same way to the woman suffering from haemorrhages (see Luke 8:8), to the Samaritan leper (see Luke 17:19), and to the blind man (see Luke 18:42). In his parable of the sower, Jesus speaks about those who 'believe and are saved'(Luke 8:12). On the lake, in the storm, he challenges his disciples to have faith (see Luke 8:25). To Jairus in regard to his daughter, Jesus says: 'Do not fear. Only believe, and she will be saved'(Luke 8:50).

Because of the central importance of faith in Luke's theology, we should delay here to examine the biblical meaning of the word 'faith', for this word, too, through constant use, is in danger of losing some of its rich content. Faith (Greek: *pistis*) and 'believing'(Greek: *pisteuō*) speak of listening to God, heeding God's inspiration, and acting accordingly. The verb especially focuses on the dynamic movement of our actual relating with God. Far from being a speculative, cerebral thing, faith is essentially practical. It is fundamentally about action. As Jesus himself says:

Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father in heaven.

– Matthew 7:21

To speak of 'faith' is to speak of the truth about God's self-revelation through his activity in the world, reaching its climax in God's self-revelation in Jesus. It is to speak of the decisions we make, and the lifestyle to which we are committed as a consequence of taking this revelation seriously.

When we examine the meaning of belief in the Hebrew Scriptures, our first observation is that while belief is impossible without trust, biblical usage is against identifying belief with trust. Hebrew words which express trust are never translated by the Greek verb *pisteuō* or by the related noun *pistis*, or adjective *pistos*. These latter only ever translate words from the Hebrew root 'mn. The Hebrew noun 'mnh is often translated 'faithfulness'. It denotes the quality one has when one acts according to one's nature or commitments. The related adjective is descriptive of a person who is faithful, reliable, secure, sure, certain, and so trustworthy (note, *trustworthy* - which is not the same as *trusting*).

God has this quality in its fullness because God always acts according to who God is. To speak of God in this way is to say that God is the *real* God, not a false one, and that God always acts according to the truth. Because of this, we can find our security in God, we can rely upon God, we can place our trust in God.

Faith

The word of the Lord is upright, and all his work is done in *faithfulness*.

– Psalm 33:4

I will take you for my wife in *faithfulness*; and you shall know the Lord.

– Hosea 2:20

When we speak of human beings having this quality, we are saying that they are *trustworthy* because what they do and say is in accordance with the truth. If we seek the truth (Jeremiah 5:1,3), and deal honestly and carry out our obligations (2Chronicles 31:12), then we share in the faithfulness of the Lord, and others in turn can rely upon us (Jeremiah 15:18). Abraham is described as having a faithful heart (Nehemiah 9:8), and Moses is spoken of as being trustworthy because of the intimacy of God's communication with him (Numbers 12:7). We hear of a faithful priest (1Samuel 2:35) and a trustworthy prophet (1Samuel 3:20). The city is spoken of as being faithful (Isaiah 1:21,26), witnesses as being reliable (Isaiah 8:2), and a supply of water as being sure (Isaiah 33:16).

When we come to the Hebrew verb *'mn* we find, as we would expect, that it means to act in accordance with who we are and with our obligations. It means to behave faithfully with the result that others can rely upon us. Since we are creatures who are totally dependent upon God, for us to behave in a way that is truly in accordance with our nature means to live in dependence upon God. This includes placing our trust in God's faithfulness. The verb 'believe' then has two essential components. It means to place our trust in God's faithfulness and to give evidence of this by behaving faithfully ourselves so that others can rely upon us.

When we say that God is 'faith-full', we are saying that God always acts according to who God is. But who is God? Among the many necessarily imperfect answers to this question found in the sacred Scriptures, there is one that stands out: God is the one who hears the cry of the poor. When God first appears to Moses, God declares:

I have observed the misery of my people who are in Egypt; I have heard their cry on account of their taskmasters. Indeed, I know their sufferings, and I have come down to deliver them.

Exodus 3:7-8

Say therefore to the Israelites, 'I am the Lord, and I will free you from the burdens of the Egyptians and deliver you from slavery to them. I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with mighty acts of judgment. I will take you as my people, and I will be your God. You shall know that I am the Lord your God, who has freed you from the burdens of the Egyptians.'

– Exodus 6:6-7

This loving kindness of God is stressed throughout the Old Testament. It finds its most sublime expression in the New Testament in the First Letter of John where we read: 'God is love' (1John 4:8,16). Since God *is* love, God can be depended on to act lovingly. God has made promises and can be depended upon absolutely to keep faith.

To believe in God, therefore, is to accept the salvation which God offers and to experience a summons, like Moses, to be God's instrument in liberating the oppressed:

God has taken his place in the divine council; in the midst of the gods he holds judgment: 'How long will you judge unjustly and show partiality to the wicked? Give justice to the weak and the orphan; maintain the right of the lowly and the destitute. Rescue the weak and the needy; deliver them from the hand of the wicked.'

– Psalm 82:1-4

Jeremiah challenges king Zedekiah:

Did not your father eat and drink and do justice and righteousness? ...
He judged the cause of the poor and needy; then it was well.
Is not this to know me? says the Lord.

– Jeremiah 22:15-16

King Josiah, Zedekiah's father, acted justly and so can truly be said to have put his faith in the faithfulness of God. The idea recurs again and again in the writings of the prophets:

Let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever flowing stream.

– Amos 5:24

Hear the word of the Lord, O people of Israel;
for the Lord has an indictment against the inhabitants of the land.
There is no faithfulness or loyalty, and no knowledge of God in the land.

– Hosea 4:1

I desire steadfast love and not sacrifice, the knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings.

– Hosea 6:6

They will not hurt or destroy on all my holy mountain; for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea.

– Isaiah 11:9

The Mosaic Law requires of God's people to be faithful to the covenant by acting with justice for the poor. They are to remember that they were once oppressed and that it was the Lord who redeemed them. The following text is typical and similar injunctions can be found throughout the books of the Law:

You shall not wrong or oppress a resident alien, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt. You shall not abuse any widow or orphan. If you do abuse them, when they cry out to me, I will surely heed their cry.

– Exodus 22:21-23

In the New Testament - and it is to this point that we must return - Jesus is portrayed as having perfect faith. He always acts towards God as Son, in perfect trust and obedience. In doing so he reveals who God is for us and how we are to respond to grace. He is our 'leader in faith'(Hebrews 12:2).

Faith

We have faith when, in accordance with who we are as creatures who are totally dependent on God, we listen to Jesus' word and open our hearts to receive the sharing in his intimate life of love with the Father which he offers us. To do so we will need to trust him. We will also need to live faithfully the life he offers us, not independently, but as people who are 'born of God' (John 1:13), like branches which draw their life from the vine to which they remain attached (John 15:1ff).

To believe is, as the English word so aptly expresses, to 'be' - 'lieve', to 'be' in 'love'. It is to be in God's love, receiving with an open heart the love which God is, the love which the risen Jesus enjoys in the eternal mystery of God's being and which he offers to us by pouring his Spirit into our hearts. To have faith is to let this divine communion transform us so that our lives, too, become radiant reflections of God's love reaching out to others and inviting them into the same shared communion. To believe is:

- to listen to God's word as revealed in Jesus.
- to heed what God says, trusting that God is faithful and so accepting his word as true with our hearts and minds, our soul and strength.
- to live in communion with Jesus, sharing his life of love and so sharing his faith – the faithfulness (fullness of faith) of God which Jesus incarnates and reveals.
- to act in accordance with God's will as revealed by Jesus, especially by living a life of love.

As Luke says, this faith comes to us 'through Jesus', for we share in his faith, and it is this man's openness to the love offered to him by Jesus through Peter and John that has brought healing and salvation to him.

Having paused to reflect on the meaning of 'faith', we should now pause to examine the key concept of this present section of Acts in which Luke is presenting Jesus to us as God's 'servant' (3:13). Luke is portraying the crucified and exalted Jesus in terms used of the servant-prophet of the anonymous writings composed during the Babylonian exile and incorporated into the scroll of Isaiah. The years of exile were critically important years in the development of the religious consciousness of the Jews. They had to try to absorb the shocking fact of the destruction of God's city and God's temple by a pagan people. The collapse of Samaria over a century earlier had been hard enough, but at least it left intact God's promises made to David. The miraculous deliverance of Jerusalem at that time was interpreted as a sign of the invincible power of the Lord and therefore of the indestructibility of God's city. With that dream shattered, they had to face a situation in which the House of David was humiliated and God's Presence has deserted the temple.

This brought them to a new humility and a new faith in God that was less reliant on institutions and on the power of the kings of Judah. It demanded a complete rethinking of their faith. Ezekiel called on the people to repent of their sins. He saw the glory of God come to Babylon and rest upon them in their exile (Ezekiel 1:28; 10:18-22). He promised them a new covenant (Ezekiel 36), and a renewed experience of God's Spirit (Ezekiel 37). He kept alive the belief that the Lord would not abandon them. They would return and rebuild the temple. This time the land would indeed be holy.

Another prophet, also of the exile, spoke of the kind of leader that they would need: someone after the fashion of Moses, the intimate, humble and faithful servant of the Lord:

Here is my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen, in whom my soul delights; I have put my spirit upon him; he will bring forth justice to the nations. He will not cry or lift up his voice, or make it heard in the street; a bruised reed he will not break, and a dimly burning wick he will not quench; he will faithfully bring forth justice. He will not grow faint or be crushed until he has established justice in the earth; and the coastlands wait for his teaching. Thus says God, the Lord ... who gives breath to the people upon it and spirit to those who walk in it: I am the Lord, I have called you in righteousness, I have taken you by the hand and kept you; I have given you as a covenant to the people, a light to the nations, to open the eyes that are blind, to bring out the prisoners from the dungeon, from the prison those who sit in darkness.

– Isaiah 42:1-7

We are reminded of Moses (see especially Luke's description, Acts 7:35-39). There are echoes of this poem in the concluding words of the song of Zechariah who sees the approaching of the dawn 'to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death' (Luke 1:79). There are echoes, too, in Jesus' reply to the disciples of John the Baptist: 'Go and tell John what you have seen and heard: the blind receive their sight, the lame walk ... the poor have good news brought to them' (Luke 7:22). God's servant is to bring forth justice 'to the nations', to be a 'light to the nations'. We have already noted Luke's highlighting of the universal scope of God's saving action in his servant-Son, Jesus (see commentary on 1:8). The prophet develops his ideas of the servant in a second poem:

Listen to me, O coastlands, pay attention, you peoples from far away! The Lord called me before I was born, while I was in my mother's womb he named me. He made my mouth like a sharp sword, in the shadow of his hand he hid me; he made me a polished arrow, in his quiver he hid me away. And he said to me, 'You are my servant, Israel, in whom I will be glorified.' But I said, 'I have laboured in vain, I have spent my strength for nothing and vanity; yet surely my cause is with the Lord, and my reward with my God.' And now the Lord says, who formed me in the womb to be his servant, to bring Jacob back to him, and that Israel might be gathered to him, for I am honoured in the sight of the Lord, and my God has become my strength — he says, 'It is too light a thing that you should be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob and to restore the survivors of Israel; I will give you as a light to the nations, that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth.'

– Isaiah 49:1-6

Once again it is the universal scope of his mission that is highlighted. Paul will quote the final words of this poem in the synagogue of Antioch in Pisidia (see 13:47). This second poem takes into consideration the difficulty of the mission; 'I have laboured in vain, I have spent my strength for nothing'. It is the aspect of suffering that is developed in the third poem of the servant.

Jesus, the servant of the Lord

The Lord God has given me the tongue of a teacher, that I may know how to sustain the weary with a word. Morning by morning he wakens — wakens my ear to listen as those who are taught. The Lord God has opened my ear, and I was not rebellious, I did not turn backward. I gave my back to those who struck me, and my cheeks to those who pulled out the beard; I did not hide my face from insult and spitting. The Lord God helps me; therefore I have not been disgraced; therefore I have set my face like flint, and I know that I shall not be put to shame; he who vindicates me is near. Who will contend with me? Let us stand up together. Who are my adversaries? Let them confront me. It is the Lord God who helps me; who will declare me guilty? All of them will wear out like a garment; the moth will eat them up. Who among you fears the Lord and obeys the voice of his servant, who walks in darkness and has no light, yet trusts in the name of the Lord and relies upon his God?

– Isaiah 50:4-10

We think of Jesus as he ‘set his face to go the Jerusalem’ (Luke 9:51; see Luke 13:31-33). We think of how he was mocked by Herod and his soldiers (see Luke 23:11). He warned his disciples to expect similar treatment, and to remain undaunted (see Luke 6:27-35).

The fourth and final poem is the one best known to us, as it is quoted or alluded to over forty times in the New Testament. The authors could find no more powerful or more beautiful expression in their sacred writings to describe the suffering which Jesus went through or the faithfulness of God who ‘has glorified his servant Jesus’. It is on this theme of humiliation and suffering leading to glorification and life that the poem begins:

See, my servant shall prosper; he shall be exalted and lifted up, and shall be very high. Just as there were many who were astonished at him — so marred was his appearance, beyond human semblance, and his form beyond that of mortals — so he shall startle many nations; kings shall shut their mouths because of him; for that which had not been told them they shall see, and that which they had not heard they shall contemplate. Who has believed what we have heard? And to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?

– Isaiah 52:13 - 53:1

It was to these words more than any others that the writers of the New Testament looked to help them understand the scandal of the death of Jesus. It was through reflection on passages such as the poems of the servant that the disciples of Emmaus were enabled to come to some understanding of the scandal of the cross:

Jesus said to them, ‘Oh, how foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have declared! Was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer these things and then enter into his glory?’ Then beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them the things about himself in all the scriptures.

– Luke 24:25-27

Likewise, Jesus’ last instructions:

Jesus said to them, ‘These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you — that everything written about me in the law of Moses, the prophets, and the psalms must be fulfilled.’ Then he opened their minds to understand the scriptures, and he said to them, ‘Thus it is written, that the Messiah is to suffer and to rise from the dead’.

– Luke 24:44-46

Peter will return to this theme;

God fulfilled what he had foretold through all the prophets, that his Messiah would suffer.

– Acts 3:18

The central section of the Isaian poem, too long to quote here, speaks in moving terms of the suffering experienced by God's chosen servant. Luke will use part of it for the text for which an Ethiopian eunuch seeks understanding from Philip (see Acts 8:32-33).

The final section of the poem returns to God's promise to reward with glory the fidelity of his servant:

It was the will of the Lord to crush him with pain. When you make his life an offering for sin, he shall see his offspring, and shall prolong his days; through him the will of the Lord shall prosper. Out of his anguish he shall see light; he shall find satisfaction through his knowledge. The righteous one, my servant, shall make many righteous, and he shall bear their iniquities. Therefore I will allot him a portion with the great, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong; because he poured out himself to death, and was numbered with the transgressors; yet he bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors.

- Isaiah 53:10-12

Luke has Jesus quote from this passage just before his passion:

I tell you, this scripture must be fulfilled in me, 'And he was counted among the lawless'; and indeed what is written about me is being fulfilled.

– Luke 22:37

Luke also has Jesus on the cross, like the servant, praying for sinners:

Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing.

– Luke 23:32

Jesus returns to the theme of his suffering and glorification throughout the gospel:

The Son of Man must undergo great suffering, and be rejected by the elders, chief priests, and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised.

– Luke 9:22

It is impossible for a prophet to be killed outside of Jerusalem.

– Luke 13:33

The Son of Man must endure much suffering and be rejected by this generation.

– Luke 17:25

The servant theme is picked up by the disciples of the prophet in exile in a passage which Luke uses to set the pattern for Jesus' ministry:

The scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to Jesus. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written: 'The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour.'

– Luke 4:17-19

Jesus, the servant of the Lord

The portrayal of Jesus as God's suffering servant who is 'taken up in glory' (1 Timothy 3:16) is central to both parts of Luke's work. We will see it being repeated in the lives of those chosen to witness to him. The presence of Jesus' Spirit in the ministry of the apostles is manifest in the 'signs and wonders' that happen through them. For Luke, the most marvellous sign and wonder is the transformation of the lives of Jesus' apostles as they reproduce in their lives the pattern of the suffering and faithful servant (see 5:41; 7:59; 9:16; 12:; 14:22; 16:23; 20:19,22-24, 35; 21:11-14).

Peter is appealing to the people. He acknowledges that neither they nor their rulers knew that the one they were rejecting was God's 'Holy and Righteous'(3:14) servant. As Paul says: 'if they had understood, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory'(1Corinthians 2:8). At the same time, Peter is not offering ignorance as an excuse. They have sinned and are in need of God's forgiveness (compare Luke 23:34). By their actions they have cut themselves off from God's presence. Like the lame man they need healing to be able to enter God's house.

Peter challenges them to see what God is doing in their midst. They should not be surprised that God's servant-Messiah should have suffered. The restoration of the lame man is a sign to them that God is offering them forgiveness. They must 'repent', that is to say, they must open their minds and hearts to God's revelation in order to see things as they really are. Like the lame man they should leap from death to life. They should rejoice and 'turn to God', walking into God's presence together with the community of those who witness to Jesus.

Through the two heavenly witnesses, God promised the disciples that they would see Jesus coming from heaven to them, though in a hidden way (see 1:11). Peter explains to the people that, through the ministry of the apostles, they have witnessed their Messiah coming to the lame man and restoring him to health and to the community. Jesus wishes the same for them. Peter invites them to acknowledge their sin and to turn to Jesus so that they may find refreshment (a 'lifting up of their soul'). The lame man had spent his whole life wandering in the desert ('he was more than forty years old', 4:22). Now, at last, he has entered the Promised Land and been refreshed by the One chosen by God to be the source of divine life for all who believe.

According to the ancient legend, Elijah was taken up into heaven (see 2Kings 2:11). This gave rise to an expectation that he would return to herald the day of the Lord (see Malachi 4:5). Already in the Gospel Luke has drawn on the Elijah legends in his presentation of Jesus' ministry (see Luke 4:25-26; 7:11-17). Now, once again, he alludes to Elijah in speaking of Jesus 'remaining in heaven until the time of universal restoration'. They are witnessing the beginning of that time, the first fruits of God's harvest. God is 'restoring the kingdom to Israel'(1:6).

¹⁷And now, friends, I know that you acted in ignorance, as did also your rulers.

¹⁸In this way God fulfilled what he had foretold through all the prophets, that his Messiah would suffer.

¹⁹Repent therefore, and turn to God so that your sins may be wiped out,

²⁰so that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord, and that he may send the Messiah appointed for you, that is, Jesus,

²¹who must remain in heaven until the time of universal restoration that God announced long ago through his holy prophets.

²²Moses said, ‘The Lord your God will raise up for you from your own people a prophet like me. You must listen to whatever he tells you.

²³And it will be that everyone who does not listen to that prophet will be utterly rooted out of the people.’

²⁴And all the prophets, as many as have spoken, from Samuel and those after him, also predicted these days.

²⁵You are the descendants of the prophets and of the covenant that God gave to your ancestors, saying to Abraham, ‘And in your descendants all the families of the earth shall be blessed.’

²⁶When God raised up his servant, he sent him first to you, to bless you by turning each of you from your wicked ways.’

As in his explanation of the outpouring on the Holy Spirit, so here, Peter links together a number of passages carefully selected from the scriptures. His aim is the same: he wants the people to experience ‘their hearts burning within’ them as Peter reveals new and wonderful meanings in the sacred texts (see Luke 24:32; also commentary on 1:16). Jesus is the one of whom Moses spoke (Peter quotes Deuteronomy 18:15-17). They must heed Moses’ words and listen to Jesus (compare Luke 9:35). Moses went on to say:

Anyone who does not heed the words that the prophet shall speak in my name, I myself will hold accountable.

– Deuteronomy 18:19

In reference to the Day of Atonement, the day on which sin was forgiven through God’s mercy, the Book of Leviticus warns:

Anyone who does not practice self-denial during that entire day shall be cut off from the people.

– Leviticus 23:29

Peter is warning the people that if they fail to listen to the one of whom Moses spoke, they will remain in their sins and so will be, as the lame man was, cut off from the assembly, unable to go into God’s presence. If, on the other hand, they heed the words of Moses, they will enjoy the blessings promised to Abraham (see Genesis 12:3; 22:18; 26:4; Numbers 24:9).

The blessing is for ‘*all* the families of the earth’, and God has promised that it will come through Abraham. God has chosen Israel to be his servant, to take the message of salvation to the ends of the earth. For this reason, God sent ‘his servant’ *first* to the Jews. It is to highlight this truth that Luke places the reconstituting of the twelve in his opening chapter. For this reason, too, he has Paul invariably going first to the synagogue before proclaiming the word to the Gentiles (compare Romans 1:16).

Peter is inviting his Jewish audience to open their hearts to the gift being offered them by God. In this way they will enjoy the Messianic blessings for themselves and be graced to fulfil the mission given to their people.

When Jesus healed a man with a withered hand in the synagogue on a Sabbath, he met opposition from the Pharisees (see Luke 6:11). This opposition continued (see Luke 11:53; 16:14). When he came to Jerusalem and challenged the way affairs were being conducted in the temple, he came up against a more powerful coalition: ‘The chief priests, the scribes, and the leaders of the people kept looking for a way to kill him’ (Luke 19:47).

The Sadducees feature only once in Luke’s Gospel. As in this present episode, they are opposed to any notion of ‘resurrection from the dead’ (see Luke 20:27-40). They are also a party which has everything to gain by keeping the peace, as they are the ones benefiting most from the Roman occupation. They had no time for Jesus and were not about to show any leniency to his disciples.

Luke names ‘the chief priests [leaders of the Sadducee party], the officers of the temple police, and the elders’ as being responsible for Jesus’ arrest on the Mount of Olives (Luke 22:52). Jesus had warned his disciples that they, too, would be arrested (see Luke 21:12-13), and now Peter and John pay the price of witnessing to Jesus. Paradoxically, an act of liberation (that of the lame man) leads to imprisonment (of those who were instruments in his liberation). However, one cannot imprison the word of God, and the community of believers continues to grow (see 2:41,47).

¹While Peter and John were speaking to the people, the priests, the captain of the temple, and the Sadducees came to them,

²much annoyed because they were teaching the people and proclaiming that in Jesus there is the resurrection of the dead.

³So they arrested them and put them in custody until the next day, for it was already evening.

⁴But many of those who heard the word believed; and they numbered about five thousand.

⁵The next day their rulers, elders, and scribes assembled in Jerusalem, ⁶with Annas the high priest, Caiaphas, John, and Alexander, and all who were of the high-priestly family.

⁷When they had made the prisoners stand in their midst, they inquired, 'By what power or by what name did you do this?'

⁸Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them, 'Rulers of the people and elders, ⁹if we are questioned today because of a good deed done to someone who was sick and are asked how this man has been healed, ¹⁰let it be known to all of you, and to all the people of Israel, that this man is standing before you in good health by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead.

The Sanhedrin before whom Peter and John are summoned was recognised by the governing Roman authority as being responsible for matters internal to Judaism. Besides exercising religious and judicial authority within the Jewish community, they also controlled commercial and financial matters. This is the same court which had convened two months earlier to condemn Jesus and to hand him over to Pilate to be put to death (Luke 22:66). They were not going to risk any disturbance then that might affect their power, and they are not going to show any sympathy for Jesus' followers now. Annas was the first high priest appointed by the Romans when they took over direct control of Judea in 6AD. Officially, it was his son-in-law, Caiaphas, who had been high priest and head of the Sanhedrin since 18AD, though the Jews still recognised Annas (see Luke 3:2). Caiaphas was deposed in 36AD. The present scene is probably in 33AD.

At the time of Jesus' trial, Peter had failed the test, but in the present scene we see the fruit of Jesus prayer:

Simon, Simon, listen! Satan has demanded to sift all of you like wheat, but I have prayed for you that your own faith may not fail; and you, when once you have turned back, strengthen your brothers.

– Luke 22:31-32

Those who witness to Jesus will suffer what he suffered, but he has promised to be with them:

They will arrest you and persecute you; they will hand you over to synagogues ... This will give you an opportunity to testify. So make up your minds not to prepare your defense in advance; for I will give you words and a wisdom that none of your opponents will be able to withstand or contradict.

– Luke 21:12-15

Unable to deny the miraculous healing of the lame man who is standing healed before them, the authorities question the apostles, as earlier they had questioned Jesus: 'Tell us, by what authority are you doing these things? Who is it who gave you this authority?' (Luke 20:2).

Peter is 'filled with the Holy Spirit'. As he testified earlier to the assembled people, so now he testifies to the Jewish leadership that it is through the power of the risen Jesus that 'this man is standing before you in good health.'

Like Jesus before him (see Luke 20:17), Peter quotes Psalm 118:22. Builders reject a certain stone judged by them to be unsuitable for the building. However, it is this stone which is chosen as the cornerstone. The verses just prior to the one quoted have a special appropriateness in a scene in which stands a man who has just entered the temple through the Beautiful Gate:

Open to me the gates of righteousness, that I may enter through them and give thanks to the Lord. This is the gate of the Lord; the righteous shall enter through it. I thank you that you have answered me and have become my salvation.

– Psalm 118:19-21

The verses immediately after give expression to the hope that Peter has for the leaders of the Jews. Like Jesus before him, Peter is offering them salvation, hoping that they will see the error of their ways and acknowledge with the Psalmist:

This is the Lord's doing; it is marvellous in our eyes. This is the day that the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it. Save us, we beseech you, O Lord! ... Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord. We bless you from the house of the Lord. The Lord is God, and he has given us light ... You are my God, and I will give thanks to you; you are my God, I will extol you. O give thanks to the Lord, for he is good, for his steadfast love endures forever.

– Psalm 118:23-29

In his explanation to the people of the significance of the outpouring of the Spirit at Pentecost, Peter quoted from Joel a passage which concludes with the words: 'Everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord will be saved'(2:21). He concludes his explanation to the Sanhedrin on the same note: 'There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among mortals by which we must be saved.'

This statement of Peter's should not be taken out of context. Luke is not attempting to answer the question of how God, in God's mysterious providence, brings to salvation those who have never heard of Jesus. Nor is he speaking of those who might think that they are rejecting Jesus, but who are in fact rejecting only the false Jesus who has been presented to them. He is appealing to the authorities to recognise in Jesus the one through whom the Lord has chosen to save. If they call upon him, they, like the man standing in their midst, will be restored. This is the 'today'(4:9), which God has chosen to 'restore the kingdom to Israel'(1:6).

¹¹This Jesus is 'the stone that was rejected by you, the builders; it has become the cornerstone.'

¹²There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among mortals by which we must be saved.'

The theme of salvation has been central to Luke's writing from the Prologue onwards. Jesus' name (see Luke 1:31) means 'YHWH is salvation'. In Mary's song of delight in response to the gift of conception which resulted from God's embrace, she speaks of God as 'my Saviour' (Luke 1:47). Zechariah praises God for having 'raised up a mighty Saviour for us in the house of his servant David' (Luke 1:69). It is through Jesus that we are 'saved from our enemies' (Luke 1:71). Since the main enemy of life is sin, for only sin can separate us from God, we experience 'salvation' by experiencing 'forgiveness of sins' (Luke 1:77). When Jesus is born, he is proclaimed as 'a Saviour, who is the Messiah, the Lord' (Luke 2:11). Simeon, a symbol of all who have been waiting for the fulfilment of God's promises, takes the child in his arms: 'My eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel' (Luke 2:29-32).

John the Baptist is preparing the way for Jesus, in whom 'all flesh will see the salvation of God' (Luke 3:6). Jesus saw his mission as bringing salvation: 'The Son of Man came to seek out and to save the lost' (Luke 19:10; see also 6:9; 8:12). He insisted that we cannot save ourselves (Luke 9:24), and when he was tempted to do so himself (see Luke 23:35,37,39), he refused. Salvation can come only from God, the source of all life. We can reject it or we can welcome it. It consists in sharing in God's own life, through the gift of God's Spirit. It is Luke's belief that God has given us Jesus to show us what salvation looks like in human terms, to draw us away from all that distracts us or separates us from true life, and, through his love, to share with us his own intimate love with the Father.

In his Gospel, Luke selects examples of people who experience salvation through Jesus' ministry: the sinful woman who anoints Jesus' feet in the home of Simon the Pharisee (see Luke 7:50); the tormented man in the country of the Gerasenes (see Luke 8:36); the woman who had been suffering from haemorrhages (see Luke 8:48); the daughter of Jairus (see 8:50); the Samaritan leper (see Luke 17:19); the blind man of Jericho (see Luke 18:42); and Zacchaeus, the chief tax collector (see Luke 19:9).

In *Acts*, Luke has presented 'Jesus of Nazareth' (2:22; 4:10), who was 'crucified and killed' (2:23,36), as having been raised to life by God (1:22; 2:24,32; 3:15,26; 4:10) and 'taken up into heaven' (1:11). God's 'servant' (3:13,26) has been 'glorified' (3:13). 'Exalted at God's right hand' (2:33) he has been made 'Lord' (1:6; 2:36) and 'Messiah' (2:36; 3:18,20; 4:10). Having received from the Father the fullness of the promised Holy Spirit, he is now offering a share in this same Spirit to all who welcome it (see 2:33). It is in communion of love that we share in the very being of God; and it is in this communion that we experience salvation.

Peter proclaims to the Sanhedrin that God has chosen to bring about this promised salvation through Jesus 'whom you crucified'. The man standing in front of them is living proof of this. They rejected Jesus. Now they are being offered another opportunity to respond to God's grace. To continue in obstinate rejection of the Lord's Messiah is to reject the covenant and the promise. It is to reject salvation.

The Sanhedrin cannot argue with Peter. However, neither do they listen to him and repent. Jesus had said: 'You cannot serve God and wealth' (Luke 16:13). He had also spoken of those in whom the seed of God's word failed to mature, because they were 'choked by the cares and riches and pleasures of life' (Luke 8:14). Unwilling to be healed, they attempt to silence Jesus' witnesses. The response of Peter and John is magnificent: 'We cannot keep from speaking about what we have seen and heard'. This has a special irony in a scene where those who should have been the leaders of the people can neither see nor hear.

Peter and John are not proclaiming a new religious theory, a new philosophy for life. They are witnessing to facts: to the real Jesus of Nazareth, and to their own real experiences, including the astonishing healing of the lame man 'in the name of the Messiah, Jesus of Nazareth' (3:6).

The Sanhedrin is forced to let Peter and John go. They are afraid to punish them because of the reaction of the people, all of whom praised God for 'what had happened'. This last phrase occurs five times in Luke's Gospel in situations of special significance. The first is in relation to Jesus' birth (Luke 2:15). The second is in relation to Jesus' extraordinary victory over the Gerasene demons (Luke 8:35). The third is when Jesus raises Jairus's daughter to life (Luke 8:56). The fourth is in relation to Jesus' own resurrection (Luke 24:12), and the fifth is in relation to the encounter with the risen Jesus which the disciples experienced on the way to Emmaus (Luke 24:35). Jesus is continuing his marvellous divine deeds through his disciples.

¹³Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John and realised that they were uneducated and ordinary men, they were amazed and recognized them as companions of Jesus. ¹⁴When they saw the man who had been cured standing beside them, they had nothing to say in opposition. ¹⁵So they ordered them to leave the council while they discussed the matter with one another. ¹⁶They said, 'What will we do with them? For it is obvious to all who live in Jerusalem that a notable sign has been done through them; we cannot deny it. ¹⁷But to keep it from spreading further among the people, let us warn them to speak no more to anyone in this name.' ¹⁸So they called them and ordered them not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus.

¹⁹But Peter and John answered them, 'Whether it is right in God's sight to listen to you rather than to God, you must judge; ²⁰for we cannot keep from speaking about what we have seen and heard.'

²¹After threatening them again, they let them go, finding no way to punish them because of the people, for all of them praised God for what had happened.

²²For the man on whom this sign of healing had been performed was more than forty years old.

²³After they were released, they went to their friends and reported what the chief priests and the elders had said to them. ²⁴When they heard it, they raised their voices together to God and said,

‘Sovereign Lord, who made the heaven and the earth, the sea, and everything in them, ²⁵it is you who said by the Holy Spirit through our ancestor David, your servant:

‘Why did the Gentiles rage, and the peoples imagine vain things? ²⁶The kings of the earth took their stand, and the rulers have gathered together against the Lord and against his Messiah.’ [Psalm 2:1-2]

²⁷For in this city, in fact, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, gathered together against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed, ²⁸to do whatever your hand and your plan had predestined to take place.

Once again, the Christian community is spoken of as being ‘together’ (Greek: *homothumadon*, sharing one mind and one heart; see 1:14; 2:46). The prayer opens with an address to God that is traditional (see Psalm 8; see also Revelation 6:10). God is the all-powerful creator ‘who made the heaven and the earth, the sea and everything in them’ (see Exodus 20:11; Psalm 146:6). The religious leaders are acting like pagan kings, daring to stand ‘against the Lord and against his Messiah’. We recall Jesus’ words: ‘Whoever is not with me is against me’ (Luke 11:23).

Once again, Jesus is described as holy (see 3:14), as God’s Son-Servant (see 3:13; 3:26), and as God’s Messiah (see 2:31,36,38; 3:6,18,20; 4:10). Once again, Luke looks beyond the reality of human cause and effect to focus on what it is that God is doing. His language must be handled with great care, lest we understand the word ‘plan’ or the word ‘predestined’ to imply that God acts in history like a puppeteer, and that human decisions are somehow inevitable. God does not exist in time. When we use past or future tenses to describe God, we must recognise that we are using terms that are inappropriate when speaking of the divine.

Luke’s aim is not to deny or compromise human freedom or to suggest that the sinful action of crucifying Jesus was somehow part of an eternal plan, as though God could be responsible for intending something so obviously unjust and sinful. His aim, rather, is to lift our minds beyond the plain of human decision and to fix our eyes on what God is doing (compare 2:22). The psalm speaks of the ‘peoples’ as imagining strange things. Peter identifies the peoples as ‘Israel’. The psalm speaks of the ‘kings of the earth’. Peter identifies them as Pilate and Herod (see Luke 23:7), who, urged on by the religious leaders of the Jews, acted to have the anointed one of God killed. God’s will is revealed, not through their sinful action, but through the way in which his servant, Jesus, faithfully persevered in love through the painful trial.

The community does not pray that the threats will cease, or that they be protected against persecution. Their prayer, rather, is that they may share in Jesus' faithfulness and continue to proclaim his word, sustained by the power of the Holy Spirit. They pray that the reign of God's saving and liberating love will continue to be manifest in powerful and convincing ways.

God's response to their prayer is to pour out his Holy Spirit upon them, as at Pentecost, when 'all of them were filled with the Holy Spirit' (2:4). We recall the following:

Mount Sinai was wrapped in smoke, because the Lord had descended upon it in fire; the smoke went up like the smoke of a kiln, while the whole mountain shook violently.

– Exodus 19:18

Then the earth reeled and rocked; the foundations also of the mountains trembled and quaked ... He bowed the heavens, and came down.

– Psalm 18:7-9

The same imagery occurs in the description of the vision of Isaiah:

The pivots on the thresholds shook at the voices of those who called, and the house filled with smoke.

– Isaiah 6:4

²⁹And now, Lord, look at their threats, and grant to your servants to speak your word with all boldness, ³⁰while you stretch out your hand to heal, and signs and wonders are performed through the name of your holy servant Jesus.'

³¹When they had prayed, the place in which they were gathered together was shaken; and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God with boldness.

³²Now the whole group of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one claimed private ownership of any possessions, but everything they owned was held in common.

³³With great power the apostles gave their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all.

³⁴There was not a needy person among them, for as many as owned lands or houses sold them and brought the proceeds of what was sold

³⁵They laid it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to each as any had need.

³⁶There was a Levite, a native of Cyprus, Joseph, to whom the apostles gave the name Barnabas (which means 'son of encouragement').

³⁷He sold a field that belonged to him, then brought the money, and laid it at the apostles' feet.

Luke took the occasion of the first influx of disciples on the day of Pentecost to summarise the essential elements that make up a Christian community. He spoke of their praying together in the Temple and in their homes, especially their 'praising God' (2:47); he spoke of their commitment to the teaching of the apostles, supported as it was by 'the many wonders and signs' done by them (2:42-43); and he spoke of 'fellowship', expressed in the communion which they shared in the breaking of bread in their homes as well as in the sharing of goods:

All who believed were together and had all things in common; they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need.

– Acts 2:44-45

It is this last element that Luke focuses on here, stressing that 'the whole group of believers were of one heart and soul'. Compare Luke's accent on 'togetherness' (Greek: *homothumadon*) in 1:14; 2:46 and 4:24. This joyful and selfless experience of communion is a sign that the time of promise has arrived. God has, indeed, given them a share of his Spirit (see Ezekiel 36:27), and 'great grace was upon them all'.

There will be no one in need among you, because the Lord is sure to bless you in the land that the Lord your God is giving you as a possession to occupy.

– Deuteronomy 15:4

Luke highlights the authority of the apostles. It is they who accept the contributions and who organise the distribution, as the leaders of the renewed people of God.

As an example of a person who was living the common life as just described, Luke introduces Barnabas, who will become a key figure in introducing Saul to the apostles (9:27), in the relations between Jerusalem and Antioch (11:22) and in the spread of Christianity from Antioch to Cyprus, to Pamphylia, and to the regions of eastern Phrygia and Lycaonia in the southern section of the Roman province of Galatia (13:2ff).