

SERMON – 8 May 2016
(Reading - Acts 1:1-11)

Our reading this morning begins with the prologue by a writer who refers to his former work and, in doing so, he is referring to the same person, namely, Theophilus. He is of course talking of the Gospel of Luke. It is thus evident that Luke wrote not only the Gospel but also the Acts of the Apostles, a two-volume work. In the Gospel of Luke we also find the same prologue again addressed to Theophilus. It was common in Luke's day to write a "prologue" but he is unique in the sense that he is the only one in the New Testament that uses this method.

In our reading he is summarising as was the practice, the intention of his former work. "In the first book, O Theophilus, I have dealt with all that Jesus began to do and teach, until the day when he was taken up, after he had given commands through the Holy Spirit to the apostles whom he had chosen. He presented himself alive to them after his suffering by many proofs, appearing to them during forty days and speaking about the kingdom of God. And while staying with them he ordered them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the promise of the Father, which, he said, "you heard from me; for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now."

Luke is telling us what happened next after Jesus was risen from the tomb.

I want to focus your attention on verses 6 and 7: "Then they gathered around him and asked him, "Lord, are you, at this time, going to restore the kingdom to Israel?" He said to them: "It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority".

When reading the text verses, I cannot help but think that the poor disciples did not understand Jesus' mission on earth. It is evident from our reading that, after all the time Jesus spend with them, they still thought of Jesus' mission as a mission to restore all Jews in their homeland by getting rid of the Romans.

They did not understand at all.

They did not join all the dots together. They viewed each individual miracle and each individual proclamation of Jesus on its own and could

not realise who Jesus really and truly was. Time and time again, He told them who He was and what His mission is. They saw with their own eyes His miracles and heard from their own ears how Jesus frequently spoke about establishing a heavenly kingdom. They were the first witnesses who heard Jesus say that He is the Messiah, the Son of God. But because they saw each and every thing that happened and each and everything that was said, on its own.

If they had just remembered to join all the dots together they would have realised who Jesus was and what He came to do.

So when did they understand? They only understood when Jesus' words became a reality "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth."

It was only then that the switch, pardon the pun, turned on for them to see and understand the bigger picture. It was only after God's Spirit filled their lives, that they managed to become His messengers. It was God who ultimately lead them to understand His purpose...

It is easy for us to say that we understand especially with the luxury of hindsight. We also hear every Sunday how God is telling us that He is present in our lives and then, when Tuesday comes, we doubt. By the time we reach Sunday again we have totally forgotten what was said and what we prayed for.

No wonder people have prayer diaries to keep track, to join all the dots together. It happens so quickly to all of us that we do not join all the dots together in our lives of faith.

It is as if we see all events in life as a big coincidence. However we know through faith that this is simply not true.

On Friday, I went to visit a lady who is a character with humour and sharp wit. She celebrated her 90th birthday during the week and I went to wish her well. She then told me that she woke up the morning after her birthday with the biggest fright. As she awoke and could still not focus, she smelled flowers...and then through the haze of her awakening she saw all the flowers surrounding her bed. She said it was then that she thought: "I am dead!".

At first she could not join all the dots...the smell and sight of the flowers and her birthday the previous day.

I think this is exactly what happens to us all on a daily basis. We know that Jesus is our Lord and Saviour, but then we worry about our sins and what tomorrow might bring. We know that God is the Almighty God but then we worry about our broken relationships, our jobs, money and all other things.

We need, just like the disciples, God's Holy Spirit to dwell in us and lead us through life. We need God to help us make sense of our lives and join the dots together....

Yes the time has come for us to recognise that God has joined the dots of our faith together and worship God for what He has done for us, what He is currently doing in our lives and what He has in store for us once we close our eyes for the last time.

And in the process, with God's Holy Spirit, help other people to join the dots as well - People who would generally shrug off any thought of divine intervention. People who would otherwise be ignorant of the miracles of daily life, like the birth of a baby, the changing seasons, a wonderful rainbow...

Yes there are so many miracles happening in and around us - Whether it is the miracle of the birth of a new baby or the miracle of an opening flower. There are many who only see the big things and miss the miracle that lies within.

Let us not do what the man in a story once did -

One night, a woman found her husband standing over their infant's crib.

As she watched him looking down at their very first child, she saw on his face a mixture of emotions: disbelief.....delight.....amazement.....scepticism.....enchantment.

Touched by this unusual display...and the deep emotions it aroused, with eyes glistening, she slipped her arm around her husband.

"A penny for your thoughts," she said.

"It's amazing!" he replied.... "It is just amazing."

"I just don't see how anybody.....could make a crib like that.....for only £66.95!"

Let us make a deliberate attempt and join the dots together once more:
We are redeemed by God, we are precious...Let us never doubt God's
presence with us through His Holy Spirit ever again...

Amen