

Jesus was so passionate about mission that the word that sums up his life is The Passion. Jesus says his mission was **to seek and save the lost**. In our Gospel reading from Luke 15 Jesus tells 3 stories about being lost and how God finds us and welcomes us home, like a shepherd who **goes after the lost sheep until he finds it**, or a **woman who sweeps her house and searches until she finds her lost coin**. Jesus wants none to be lost, but all to be found. In the Epistle reading for today we read: **Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners – of whom I am the worst!** 1 Tim. 1. St Paul was passionate about saving sinners. Acts 1 begins with the great mission statement: **you will receive power when the HS comes upon you and you shall be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth**. Last week we looked at Mission to the Ends of the Earth, as we looked at mission in Vietnam. But Jesus didn't say: *begin in Vietnam*. Jesus said: **begin in Jerusalem**. Begin where you are. Begin in Murray Bridge.

The first 7 chapters of Acts deal with mission in Jerusalem. That's where the Apostles lived. That's where they began their mission from Pentecost Day. They were passionate about mission in Jerusalem until Persecution came and **all except the Apostles were scattered throughout Judea and Samaria... Those who were scattered preached the word wherever they went**. Act 8.2,4. Before this, from Pentecost Day the church was thriving in Jerusalem. There was great boldness, great joy, great worship, great preaching, great healing, great generosity, great love for one another - all due to the love of Christ and the power of the HS at work in and through them. But Satan could not let this continue without interfering. Satan interfered through the religious leaders, who tried to stop what the Apostles were saying and doing, Acts 4.17f. When that failed Satan sowed his satanic seeds amongst the members of the church. Satan corrupted some of the church members.

**ANANIAS AND SAPPHIRA** sold land and gave some of the money to the church. However they lied to the church. When Peter confronted them they said they gave the full amount. When Peter accused them of lying to the HS first Ananias, then Sapphira dropped dead, right before the Apostles. Now this seems frightfully harsh to us. Can you imagine somebody in this church telling a lie about how much they have given to the Lord, and dropping dead in front of the pastor? This hardly seems a "user friendly" way to do mission work! Who is going to join the church if you run the risk of dropping dead? But amazing things happened as a result of these deaths. It really was: *drop dead and live*. Ananias and Sapphira dropped dead because of their sins, but the church sprung to life and grew.

**Great fear seized all who heard what had happened v5... Great fear seized the whole church and all who heard about these events v11**. We don't like talking about the **fear of God**. We'd rather see God as a friend who winks at our sins, and forgives them, whether we repent or not. We want a God of cheap grace. We want a God who forgives our sins but doesn't expect us to turn from them. We want a God who allows us to serve God & Money.

Following such a god is what is killing the Church. A church that is weighed down with sinful living is a church that is not led by the Spirit, & that is not interested in mission, but only in itself. **It is a dreadful thing to fall into the hands of the living God, Heb 10.** A Passionate church follows & fears the living God. Like Azlan, our God is both very good and very fearful, and we *fear, love and trust in God*, and we are passionate about him and his mission.

**The Apostles performed many signs and wonders among the people.v12. .. People brought the sick ... and those who were tormented by evil spirits and all of them were healed. V15f.** Two dropped dead because they lied to the Lord. Hundreds were healed because they trusted in the Lord. Through the Apostles Jesus continues to heal the sick and deliver the demon possessed. And the Holy Spirit continues that ministry of signs and wonders, and healing and deliverance today. One of the greatest signs of the powerful presence of Jesus is when the sick are healed in answer to prayer, or the laying on of hands, and when evil spirits are driven out. When the Holy Spirit exercises the authority of Jesus through the church, people are drawn to Jesus to be healed and to find new life and hope. Do you believe Jesus has authority to heal today? Does your church have a ministry of healing, and driving out evil spirits? This is a most powerful sign that Jesus is real.

**No one else dared join them, even though they were highly regarded by the people. Never the less, more and more men and women believed in the Lord and were added to their number. V13-14.** This amazes me! People are afraid of Jesus and the church, and they stay away. People regard the Christians & God very highly and are drawn to God and the church. They are not drawn to Christ and the Church because it is user friendly and has padded pews and PowerPoint, and video clips and sermons that make you laugh. They are drawn to Jesus and the church because God is so real, and so powerfully at work changing lives, and the Christians live such transformed lives that people say: *I want what she's having!.....* Isn't this what we need today? We need a holy church: Holy, because we're cleansed by the blood of Christ; Holy, because we're transformed by the Holy Spirit to renounce every sin, and to be filled with the fruit of love and joy and peace and patience and self control. Only when MB sees a church so passionate about Jesus will it be drawn to Jesus and the church!

**Then the religious leaders were filled with jealousy, and arrested the Apostles v17-18.**

The devil opposes passion for the lost. Often he opposes it through apathetic church members or leaders, who try to cool the church down to their lukewarmness. Follow the passionate Jesus in mission, not the fearful and pathetic passion blockers. Jesus says: **Go and tell the people all about this new life v20.** God let them out of prison and they kept on teaching people about Jesus. No fear of people. Only fear and love of God. The rest of the chapter shows how there is no stopping these bold and passionate Apostles. In v41ff we read that after they had been flogged and forbidden to speak of Jesus, the **Apostles rejoiced they had been counted worthy of suffering disgrace for the name... and they never stopped teaching and proclaiming the good news.** That is passion. That is the passion of Jesus for the lost. That is the passion the church needs to save the lost in MB. Amen.